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Southern United States English as a Rhetorical Device in The Field of Marketing: A Study and Implications for Business Writing Pedagogy

Megan Jacklynn Busch

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SOUTHERN UNITED STATES ENGLISH AS A RHETORICAL DEVICE IN THE
FIELD OF MARKETING: A STUDY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS
WRITING PEDAGOGY

by

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compassion through the stress and for his genuine joy through the excitement during this era in our lives.

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation project, I examine how professionals in the South use their Southern United States English (SUSE) to communicate in business situations. My goals are to (1) understand how regional language variety rhetorically shapes written professional communication and (2) establish a pedagogical framework for business writing that attunes to the nuances of language variation in the workplace. I hypothesize that speakers of SUSE implement regional dialects to form interpersonal business connections and build ethos and that SUSE has a significant rhetorical role to place in professional communications. To test this hypothesis, I develop a hybrid method of interviewing, discourse analysis, and genre analysis that allows researchers to study regional dialects in workplace writing and to engage with writers about their perceptions of and motivations behind dialect use. Putting this method into action, I offer a focused study of women writers from coastal South Carolina who work at a variety of marketing agencies and speak SUSE. The study includes interviews with participants about perceptions of their regional Southern dialect and reflections of their past education in dialect use. I further analyze email communications written by participants using discourse analysis and genre analysis methods. The results from this narrow study offer an example of my hybrid method in action and pave the way for future research in composition-rhetoric, business writing, and sociolinguistics about the professional communications of additional groups using other regional dialects. Furthermore, the results provide a foundation upon which to

craft a business writing pedagogy that foregrounds language variety as a rhetorical tool of professional communication.

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CHAPTER 1: BUSINESS SAVVY AND SOUTHERN SPEAK—RAISING THE QUESTIONS

Ask a Southerner about their dialect, and they will likely have a story to tell. Some will beam with pride about the tell-tale drawl of their home communities. Others reveal a fish-out-of-water feeling when standing before an audience with a different dialect. Still others hold memories of parents hyper-correcting to change the pronunciation of Vienna sausages from /var'i:nə/ (rhyming with *hyena*) to /vi, enə/ (the actual city name) or to remove the *yonders* and *y'alls* from their vocabulary. No matter the experience, most Southerners have a relationship with the language of the region that has marked their past and influences their current and future interactions with others.

In 2020, The Bitter Southerner—an organization devoted to sharing stories of the South *not* tainted by the stereotypes of Southerners arguing about states' rights or “flying a rebel flag in [their front] yard”—released an episode of their podcast focusing on the ways popular culture perceives the language of the South and the assumptions that accompany the dialect (Lauterer et al.). In the episode, “What We Talk About When We Talk About How We Talk,” host Chuck Reese says (a little crassly):

Now, I was born and raised with this voice, there's not anything I can do about it, and I did try for a while. That was when I lived in New York City, two separate times, seven years in total. And, try as I might, I couldn't shake the way I talked. And it didn't take me long to just give up trying. I just relied on the fact that I was

fairly smart. You know, I could actually build a compound, complex sentence on the fly, and if people couldn't hang with the way I spoke, after they figured out that I could do things like that, they could just walk themselves over to the Hudson River and jump right in...Like, if you assume that I'm dumb because of how I speak, I just think the joke's on you. Still, I don't know any Southerner, anywhere, whose accent hasn't given them some trouble at least one point in their life. (Reece 2:42-4:09)

Reece's experience is not uncommon, as he alludes. Southerners have ways of speaking that influence their interactions with others in all arenas of life, including business and workplace settings. Reece notes, "Lots of my fellow Southerners have felt the pressure to get rid of theirs [their dialects] in various work or education situations" (Reece 29:23).

To demonstrate this pressure, Reece interviews Kristy Whitman Howell, who grew up in Mississippi but currently lives and works in Kansas, and Jessica Whatley, who grew up in Tennessee and currently lives and works in California. Both women express a desire to repress their dialects in professional settings. Whatley says, referencing those who comment on her Southern drawl, "They're trying to make fun of me, so they'll say things like, you know, 'Oh, that's that redneck social worker'" (32:36). What is more interesting about these women than this feeling of marginalization, though, is the rhetorical utility they find in the use of their Southern dialects. Howell engages her Southern accent more fully when speaking passionately about environmental social justice with the aim of demonstrating that Southerners have an important place in the conversation about ecological preservation, a move that builds ethos for Southerners in a larger, global conversation (31:17). Whatley, on the other hand, relies on her Southern

dialect to create connections between herself and her clients and to woo jurors. She reveals that clients tend to open up to her more because of her “gentle” way of speaking and that she is able to win more jurors over in a courtroom when advocating for her clients because of her Southern voice (34:13, 35:12). Like Howell, Whatley identifies her Southern speech as a key component of her ethos. For both women, their Southern dialects have become a “powerful tool” for rhetorical work (31:56).

As I listened to this podcast, it reaffirmed that—through this dissertation research—I wanted to know the intricacies of this use of Southern language in the workplace. What is the rhetorical work being done when Southerners use their dialects on the job? Does this experience also occur in written communication? How are they building ethos or creating connections with the audience? How adept or self-aware are Southerners in engaging their dialect as a “powerful tool” (Reece 31:56)? How did they learn to do this, and might it be taught?

I must admit here that these questions I seek to answer do not stem solely from *The Bitter Southerner Podcast*. I am from the South; its language is my own. I have similar experiences of using my Southern voice with pride—and also being criticized for that same Southern voice. I remember as a child, my family had friends from Buffalo, New York, and each summer when they would visit my hometown of Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, they would try to persuade their children to say “yes, ma’am” and “no, sir” like I did, as they thought it was the height of politeness and gentility. Alternatively, in 2014, I was working as the managing editor of *Charleston Home + Design* magazine, and I wrote a cover-story-interview with then-Miss South Carolina Brooke Mosteller. In an interview question, I wrote, “Y’all definitely have some deep roots in the area,”

speaking of her home and her family's ancestry in Charleston, South Carolina (Busch 109). I received a hefty handful of emails claiming that my use of *y'all* in this article was uneducated and out of place. As I grew in my pre-academic career in writing and in marketing, I learned to lean on my dialect when needed—when I needed to smooth over an issue with a client, perhaps—and to repress it when required—when I needed to impress a client's new investors from Germany, for instance. I believe I have learned to engage my Southern dialect strategically. But how have others learned to do this?

My personal curiosity is merely one impetus for this project. Researchers in the fields of composition-rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and business writing have studied the effects that language variation can have for rhetorical style and in spoken mediums, yet these fields lack studies that might provide insight into how Southerners use their Southern United States English (SUSE from here on) in workplace writing as a powerful rhetorical tool. Research in sociolinguistics supports my own experiences, and the experiences of those interviewed on *The Bitter Southerner Podcast*, of SUSE being received by audiences both positively and negatively (and on a continuum between those points). That is, SUSE can garner multiple, conflicting receptions from audiences where it can be perceived as evidence of little education, manipulation, gentleness, trustworthiness, and more. Cramer, Tamasi, and Bounds write in "Southernness and Our Linguistic Planets of Belief: The View from Kentucky," that there are two overarching perceptions of a Southerner: "either distressed, cultured, and well-kept" or "gun-toting, camouflage- or overall-wearing, rebel-flag-flying, toothless, [and] mustachioed" (445). The language of the South can also fall into these stereotypical camps, being perceived by listeners as unintelligent or genteel. Michael Montgomery and Ellen Johnson explain

that there is an overarching tendency for Americans to typecast Southern speech as “bad” (164). They write, “The most important locus of bad English is the South” (164).

However, the authors note that this good-bad dichotomy is not the only way audiences and speakers perceive SUSE. Audiences often associate SUSE with “pleasantness,” and for speakers, SUSE provides “solidarity and identity” within communities in the region (164). With varying and seemingly conflicting perceptions of SUSE, it can be difficult for a speaker to know when to switch into a dialect less marked by regionality and when to engage SUSE rhetorically, especially in the workplace writing where a certain level of professionalism is required. This dissertation seeks to bring clarity to this linguistic space to further understand the rhetorical moves that happen through language variation in professional settings, and this research seeks to answer: What can researchers in business writing learn, and therefore teach students, about how rhetors engage with written regional dialects in workplace settings?

To answer this question, I examined how professionals in the South use SUSE to communicate in business situations in order to (1) understand how regional language variety rhetorically shapes written professional communication and (2) establish a pedagogical framework for business writing that attunes to the nuances of language variation in the workplace. I hypothesized that speakers of SUSE implement regional dialects to form interpersonal business connections and build ethos. To test this hypothesis, I developed a hybrid method of interviewing, discourse analysis, and genre analysis that allows researchers to study regional dialects in workplace writing and to engage with writers about their perceptions of and motivations behind dialect use.

Putting this method into action, this dissertation offers the results of a focused study of 12 women writers from coastal South Carolina who work at a variety of marketing agencies and speak SUSE. The study includes interviews with participants about perceptions of their regional Southern dialect and reflections of their past education in dialect use. I further provide an analysis of email communications written by participants using discourse analysis and genre analysis methods. The results from this narrow study offer an example of my hybrid method in action and pave the way for future research in composition-rhetoric, business writing, and sociolinguistics about the professional communications of additional groups using other regional dialects. Furthermore, the results provide a foundation upon which to craft a business writing pedagogy that foregrounds language variety as a rhetorical tool of professional communication.

A Theoretical Framework of Language: An Historical Perspective

The concept of “good” or “bad” English that Montgomery and Johnson mention above in reference to the language of the South has roots in the concept of a correct or standard version of English (164). In order to understand, from a sociolinguistic and composition-rhetoric perspective, how standard language ideologies¹ influence perceptions of SUSE, we must examine (briefly) a history and the ideologies of language variation in the fields. The research of sociolinguistics has influenced the stance of composition-rhetoric scholars towards language variation, and research from the two fields often overlap.

¹ Standard Language Ideology is the belief that there is a correct, prescriptive version of a language that all speakers strive to speak and write. In the United States, the Standard Language Ideology about English often portrays the language as a relatively unaccented, midwestern, middle-class, white, news-caster type of speech that follows the prescribed rules of grammar, syntax, and pronunciation.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, there is no standard version of English and no qualitative judgments (good or bad) can be made on a particular language variety. Rosina Lippi-Green demonstrates that notions of a standard English are “abstraction[s]” and it exists only as an idea, not in the reality of language use (62). Wolfram and Schilling-Estes add, “...it is not possible to speak a language without speaking a dialect of the language” (7). The notion of a standard English is merely a social construct because each speaker of English uses a dialect of the language. Furthermore, to explain how language lacks value markers in itself, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes note, “Dialects are not necessarily positively or negatively valued; their social values are derived strictly from the social position of their community of speakers” (8). In essence, Wolfram and Schilling-Estes hold that a dialect is neither “good” nor “bad” (as Montgomery and Johnson allude), but that these perceptions are determined by the social status of the dialect’s speakers (164).

Although sociolinguists have held this view for quite some time, social change to alter the value judgements placed on certain dialects has been slower to take effect (and is perhaps why Montgomery and Johnson state that Americans often perceive the South as a hotbed for “bad” English) (164). In an attempt to bring about a new view of language variety in the United States, scholars in composition-rhetoric sought to champion linguistic social justice through the introduction of the Students’ Right to their Own Language (SRTOL) statement released in the 1970s. The push for quelling standard language ideologies is closely aligned with America’s racial divide, and much research supporting SRTOL and conversations about language variety have roots in the legitimization of African American Vernacular English (AAVE). However, the history of

SRTOL and the rise in research of AAVE have direct impacts on how composition-rhetoric scholars view linguistic variety—including SUSE—in research and pedagogy.

Before the 1950s, ideologies of a standard English were upheld by the school systems, perpetuating the concept that there was a right or wrong way to speak and write English. A social movement to question language ideologies began with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in the 1950s to desegregate schools, a move that revealed the vast language differences between African American students their white classmates, bringing questions of language standardization to the forefront of social conversation. Awareness of these differences grew throughout the '60s and '70s in what linguist Geneva Smitherman calls “a virtual explosion of work on language of the US slave descendants” in which a “new generation of scholars and linguists...focused attention on African American Language” (Smitherman “Word from the Mother” 10). From the research of this linguistic movement, the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) released the 1974 statement “Students’ Right to Their Own Language,” an effort to increase language equality in the composition classroom. The statement reads:

We affirm the students' right to their own patterns and varieties of language—the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style. Language scholars long ago denied that the myth of a standard American dialect has any validity. The claim that any one dialect is unacceptable amounts to an attempt of one social group to exert its dominance over another. Such a claim leads to false advice for speakers and writers, and immoral advice for humans. A nation proud of its diverse heritage and its cultural and racial

variety will preserve its heritage of dialects. We affirm strongly that teachers must have the experiences and training that will enable them to respect diversity and uphold the right of students to their own language. (CCCC 1)

This statement offered a move towards change for composition-rhetoric scholars, and changing practices of research (and pedagogy) has led to new knowledge about how language variety and difference works for a hyper-diverse population of writers.

Although this statement confirms the sociolinguistic view that a standard language variety is socially constructed, the implementation of SRTOL in the classroom was a slow process, and as such, social change on a large scale was likewise a slow process. Sociolinguists and the CCCC pushed for the use of language variety to become socially and academically acceptable, yet instructors continued to teach a standard. In 1977, Jesse L. Colquit observed this divide between the important research happening in the field and the practical application in the classroom, arguably the most important locus for widespread social change in standard language ideologies. He writes in “The Student’s Right to His Own Language: A Viable Model or Empty Rhetoric?”:

While the rhetoric articulating the concept of the student’s right to his language has increased, the dominant instructional models, found in all schools, reject this concept. At the policy making level, little attention has been given to the development and implementation of a viable instructional model to legitimize the student’s right to his language. What is needed is not more rhetoric to articulate the concept, but ample financial support to teacher education programs and state departments of education for further research in changing teacher perceptions, developing teaching strategies and pilot programs. (Colquit 20)

Colquit calls for pragmatic help to carry out the sentiment of SRTOL—assistance in policies and pedagogical strategies that work—knowing that for a change in mindset to occur that both instructors and the government needed to be on board with the removal of standard language ideologies. Colquit’s desire for practical assistance came in the 1990s with the Oakland School Board² and its attempt to move forward in policy and instruction only to be met with harsh opposition.

Shortly after the passing of the Oakland School Board resolution, Geneva Smitherman published “CCCC’s Role in the Struggle for Language Rights,” in *College Composition and Communication*, which details the progress that the CCCC has made over the years to ensure language equality in the college composition-rhetoric classroom. Referencing the Oakland Schoolboard Resolution in her very near past, Smitherman argues that nonstandard dialect must begin in the K-12 classroom. She writes, “...in order for a ‘dent’ to be made in [negative language] attitudes and practices, the *Students’ Right* would need to be embraced by K-12 teachers” (Smitherman “CCCC’s Role” 371). Both sociolinguists and composition-rhetoric scholars believed that change in standard language ideologies would occur in the classroom.

So where does this leave sociolinguists and composition-rhetoric scholars today? From the early 2000s to the present, SRTOL discussions have broadened to address not merely the speech of the African American community, but also the speech of any dialect or language speaker in the classroom (as was the original spirit of the CCCC’s statement). While this initial interest in breaking down the concept of standard language

² In 1997, the Oakland School Board passed a resolution that (A) determined AAVE to be a language and *not* a dialect of English and (B) allowed for and encouraged the use of AAVE within the school system.

gained scholarly and cultural attention through the study of African American English, the more widespread effects of removing the concept of a standard has allowed for studies of code-meshing and translingualism to extend to the voices of speakers of all dialects, including SUSE. These new ideologies of translingualism and code-meshing (examined further in Chapter 2) that replace standard language ideologies place value on the perceived differences among language users, as both concepts identify the fluid nature of language to dip in and out of varieties, codes, and registers in a given speech event.

Overall, the fields of composition-rhetoric and linguistics hold that there is no standard variety of English. Instead, the language is fluid, ever changing, and different for every person who speaks it; in the words of Steven Vertovec, language is actually influenced by “super-diversity” (that is, differing for each speaker), and it is nearly impossible to find a standard version of any language (171). From a study of immigrants in London, Vertovec concludes that the languages of those living in today’s era of global cosmopolitanism are more than multicultural. He writes, “Super-diversity is a term intended to capture a level and kind of complexity surpassing anything many migrant-receiving countries have previously experienced” (171). Vertovec’s more nuanced ideology of language—that it is more diverse than researchers can fathom—lends a complexity to the SRTOL statement that speakers and writers employ language from a vast range of multicultural sources when they compose. The concept of super-diversity solidifies the importance of SRTOL today as it calls for an embrace of ever-various language use.

Despite efforts of sociolinguists and composition-rhetoric scholars to champion SRTOL, popular culture has been slow to move towards abolishing a standard (as demonstrated by the experiences of those interviewed on *The Bitter Southerner Podcast*), and some scholars still hold to the importance of teaching a standard form of English and are skeptical of code-meshing and translingual ideologies. For instance, Vivette Milson-Whyte argues that while she sees the value of code-meshing, there are potential negative impacts. She writes, “First, there are problems with valorizing, yet not legitimizing, minoritized languages; second, there are/can be problems arising from a lack of adequate knowledge about the ‘rhetorical strategies of switching’; and third, there is the potential for ignoring the sameness and difference while attempting to address difference in language use” (Milson-Whyte 118). Additionally, Jeffry Zorn, a staunch opponent of both SRTOL and translingualism, offers a critique of the statement in which he valorizes a standard English as a superior mode of communication (Zorn “Counter Argument” and “Translingualism”)³. Naysayers like Zorn, though, are few and far between today, and most scholars in composition-rhetoric and sociolinguistics have embraced translingualism, code-meshing, and dialect diversity. Despite this opposition by members of the field of composition-rhetoric and culture at large, the removal of standard language ideologies offers a more positive approach to language that champions social justice for equal language rights and provides a more accurate description (rather than a prescription to conform to a standard) of how language users enact various forms of English, particularly SUSE.

³ It is significant to note that Zorn’s pieces were never published in flagship journals in rhetoric, composition, or linguistics. Instead, his work appeared in *Academic Questions*.

I hold that a standard language ideology is problematic and reliant on a standard that is altogether nonexistent, and this dissertation research rests on the concepts that SUSE is not a deviation from a mythical, correct version of English. Instead, it is one of many Englishes. In this dissertation, SUSE will often be compared with Plain English or Professional English, the variety of English often socially expected of those writing in business communication genres. By positioning SUSE in contrast with the socially expected language variety of a particular genre, I wish *not* to place a value judgement on deviations from that expectation. Using SUSE in place of Plain or Professional English, or more commonly in conjunction with Plain or Professional English, is not a deviation from a standard, but a difference between two Englishes.

Historical Examples as Foundations for Current Research

When I began talking about developing this dissertation research project, one question I frequently fielded is, “Sure, people may speak with a Southern dialect, but do you really think it will appear in their writing?” This question reveals an assumption that speakers of SUSE filter out their regional language variety in written communication (particularly in professional emails), which is often considered to be a more formal mode of communication. However, it is not uncommon for Southerners to incorporate their dialects into professional writing. A study of the letters of both Flannery O’Connor and Zora Neale Hurston⁴ offer ample examples of writers leaning upon the language of the South to craft connections with audience members and develop ethos (Busch “Dust Tracks” and “Apology”). For instance, in a study of the professional letters of Flannery

⁴ The studies of both O’Conner’s writing and Hurston’s writing were conducted by me. Full methods and results from these tangential studies are available from the author by request.

O'Connor, the author integrates written forms of SUSE (termed SLV, Southern Language Variety in this study) in 18.75% of her business letters written to professional superiors (those contacts who have important influence on the success or failure of O'Connor's professional endeavors, such as publishers and patrons of her work).



Figure 1.1: Flannery O'Connor's Letters with Lexical Markets of SLV. This chart indicates the percentage of professional letters that contain lexical markers of SLV (Southern Language Variety) in the collection of Flannery O'Connor's letters. The total number of letters categorized as professional and written to a professional superior is 96. The 18.75-percent represents 18 letters that contain markers of SLVs.

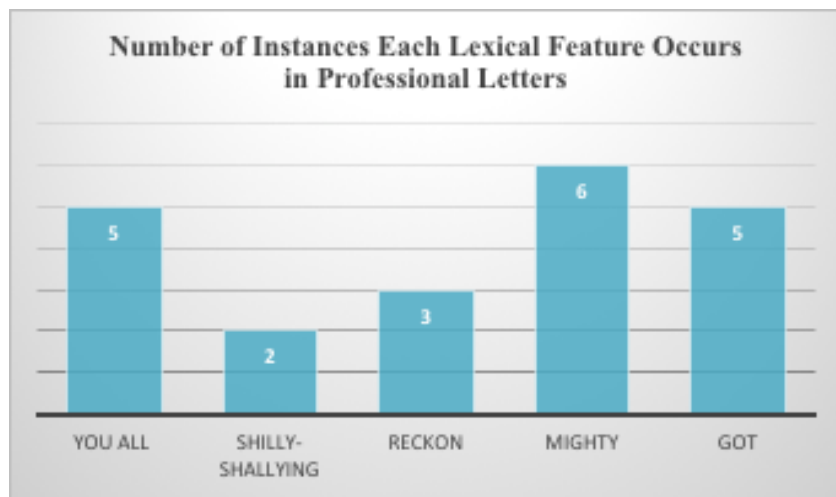


Figure 1.2: Number of instances of Each Lexical Feature in O'Connor's Professional Letters. This chart indicates the number of occurrences of each lexical feature in the 18 professional letters composed to professional superiors.

O'Connor uses specific lexical features to bring her SUSE into her professional writing with the words: *y'all* (*you all*)⁵, *shilly-shallying*, *reckon*, *mighty* (as an intensifier), and *got*. The distribution of these features among her professional letters is outlined in Figure 1.2 shown above.

Primarily, O'Connor invokes her dialect for one of five purposes: (1) an apology or excuse, (2) an expression of uncertainty (about money, the publishing process, or otherwise), (3) an expression of excitement, (4) a recounting of past memories, or (5) an attempt to create a personal connection with the reader. She engages SUSE for specific rhetorical purposes in written communicative events to professional superiors—writing events that would, by conventional teaching of business communication, require a professional tone and Plain English.

Zora Neale Hurston, too, relies on her SUSE (intersecting with AAVE) in her professional communications. Like O'Connor, Hurston strategically integrates her Southern language into her professional letters, and she offers an acute attention to her audience. When writing to unfamiliar professional contacts, Hurston's letters scarcely contain reference to Southern African American English. In correspondence with professional contacts with whom Hurston had a personal relationship, there is a more prominent influence from Southern African American English, and in her letters to friends and family, Hurston's unique language as an African American Southerner is

⁵ O'Connor uses *y'all* in her formal letters not in its contracted form, but written out as *you all*. This still represents a feature of SLV because it is a change to the mainstream second person plural pronoun, *you* (Davies 59). Davies explains, "Responding to the problem of the lack of distinction between singular and plural, Southern English has produced a plural form, 'y'all,' which is a contraction of 'you' + 'all.' Southerners use this form as a part of their speaking style even in relatively formal contexts but not in formal writing" (60). O'Connor opts for the uncontracted version for these formal letters.

readily apparent. Only when Hurston addressed those contacts whom she had never met before did she repress her SUSE.



Figure 1.3: Southern African American English in Zora Neale Hurston's Letters. This chart demonstrates the continuum in which Zora Neale Hurston implements her SUSE based on familiarity with her audience in her collection of letters.

There is an overarching trend in the level of influence from SUSE correlating to Hurston's familiarity and comfort with her audience or addressee, and her level of familiarity with her audience is the overriding factor of SUSE use.

These two historical examples offer a glimpse into the ways writers use SUSE in workplace communications. In writing, both O'Connor and Hurston implement lexical, syntactic, and phonological markers of SUSE in their letters. There is little evidence to indicate that today's writers have made a vast change in the way they communicate in the South. From experience working in the South with many professionals, SUSE is still in use in business settings, where, perhaps, it is less expected. Maintaining the distinctness of the language of the South and its use in everyday communicative moments, Montgomery and Johnston write, "Change is inherent to all languages and varieties, and not necessarily toward the mainstream even in the increasingly mobile South" (xviii).

Modern speakers and writers of SUSE are not necessarily becoming more homogenized in their language patterns, and it is likely that SUSE use in written business communications is still alive and well.

Study Overview

If it is likely that SUSE has a place in business communications, how can we—as rhetors, as compositionists, and as business-writing scholars—understanding the nuances of its use? This dissertation study aims to understand that question and seeks out how we can apply that knowledge to pedagogical practice in the business communication classroom. To craft a clearer picture of how SUSE influences business communications, I developed a three-part study that included: interviews, email analysis, and a textbook review.

In the first part, I selected twelve participants to interview about their SUSE use in the workplace. All participants are career professionals in marketing who are from the American South and who reside and work in Coastal South Carolina. They represent varying career levels (from early career to executive), they come from varying educational backgrounds (from no college education to master’s degrees), they work in various marketing roles (from graphic designer to account executive), and their workplaces vary in size and type (from small agencies to marketing teams housed in national corporations). This small subset allowed me to examine a portion of the professional world and how participants use and understand SUSE in the workplace in hopes that the methodology in practice here will allow for larger, broader studies of regional dialects in use across business sectors. Through this segment of the study, participants reflected on their upbringing in the South, particularly in reference to their

language, and indicated their stances toward using SUSE in the workplace (some were *highly* against it and embarrassed at finding they use some elements of SUSE, while others embraced their language in writing and beyond).

During the interviews, I asked participants to search their emails for specific markers of SUSE. As they located emails, I asked about the context and use of the SUSE identifier and asked participants to forward that email to me. With the documents in my inbox, I used a mix-method approach that combines discourse analysis and genre analysis to parse out the nuances of the text and understand how that text worked within the genre ecologies and within the discourse of the organization. This analysis revealed that speakers of SUSE were apt to use the language variety in their workplace emails, even in instances they believed they would have *not* used SUSE. Specifically, members of the study implemented SUSE under particular conditions (or with certain exigencies) based on their past experiences with the language (often negative); the confidence they held in themselves as smart, competent marketers; and to some extent, the relationship they have with their audience (though this last factor was not as significant as I or participants originally imagined). Participants, too, use the language as an invention strategy to establish their own ethos, develop an effective call to action, and relieve tension in stressful situations. These uses of the language demonstrate the rhetorical nature of SUSE use in professional settings.

The third part of this study was a textbook analysis. I sought to put this research into action in the business and professional writing classrooms, and I hypothesized that current textbooks do not account for the use of regional dialects in their instruction. I worked with five major publishers to gain access to their current (published between

2016-2021) texts for business, professional, or workplace writing or communication. I searched the digital texts (or used the index for print texts) using a preset list of search terms related to language variation, noting which texts included references to this part of professional communication. I then examined the available sections referencing these terms and charted whether the author supported the use of language varieties, warned against straying from Plain English, or neglected to address the issue at all. Of the eight textbooks under scrutiny, only two (25%) supported professional writers using SUSE in the workplace. This final research element confirmed the lack of support for teaching language variety in the business writing classroom from the textbooks available from major publishing houses.

Research Goals

The goals of pursuing this three-part study were twofold. First, I sought to understand how regional language varieties rhetorically shape written professional communication through the first two parts: interviews and email analysis. SUSE is undoubtedly part of Southerners' lives—both in and out of the workplace—whether they rely on that regional way of speaking, have worked to eradicate the drawl from their voice, or switch between SUSE and a more homogenized version of English depending upon audience and situation. I primarily sought to expand the knowledge of three fields—composition-rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and business writing—to demonstrate more fully how language, writing, and business are regionally situated and mutually influential of each other in the South. The forthcoming chapters provide a new method and heuristic (previewed above) for understanding communication in the workplace as it intersects with regional language variety. That method has been applied to a small subset of women

in marketing to illuminate the linguistic choices made in everyday business communications.

This new knowledge about regional language variation in professional settings, accompanied by the textbook study that reveals the gap in instructional support, provides a foundation for a second goal: to establish a pedagogical framework for business writing that attunes to those nuances of language variation in the workplace. Since the impetus set forth by SRTOL, instructors in composition-rhetoric have sought to bring new ideologies that abolish the concept of a standard, correct English into the classroom. Many have succeeded, with new pedagogies aimed at linguistic equality (such as grading contracts à la Asao B. Inoue or translingual literacy narratives à la Suresh Canagarajah). Understanding how regional language variation works in professional settings paves the way for a new pedagogy founded on linguistic equality and rhetorical astuteness in the business writing classroom. The following chapters build an argument, through social-scientific empirical research, in support of this business writing pedagogy.

Chapter Preview

“Chapter 2: A Review of Literature” offers a detailed literature review of relevant previous research in composition-rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and business writing, examining the fields individually and as they speak to each other. In this chapter, I first establish a working definition of genre and workplace genres based on current research and scaffolded by Bawarshi and Reiff’s *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Next, I turn attention to theories of email—the genre under scrutiny in this dissertation project—and its precarious position as a conduit of other genres. Then, I examine the studies that link rhetorical style and language variation to

professional, generic communication. Finally, I shift to sociolinguistic research about regional dialects in the workplace in specific and review how an examination of SUSE in the workplace can be a move towards linguistic social justice in line with the goals of SRTOL. The literature reviewed in this chapter offers a foundation for my methodology.

“Chapter 3: Methodology, Methods, and Participants” details my hybrid method of interviewing participants and coding and analyzing data using the methodologies of Vijay K. Bhatia in combination with those of Clay Spinuzzi. Specifically, this chapter puts Bhatia and Spinuzzi in conversation in order to craft a methodology that attunes to the interdiscursive nature of genres as they relate to both discourse and rhetoric. Furthermore, I outline the steps of my study, including the details of interviewing, collecting artifacts, and coding data. I conclude with a description of each participant. This segment of the chapter is a returning point in the dissertation, as through the remainder of the chapters, readers are encouraged to continually reference this section for a reminder of the participants’ contexts and lived experiences in the workplace. Overall, this chapter offers a detailed explanation of my research method and methodology, plus an introduction to each study participant.

“Chapter 4: Quantitative Results” shares the results of implementing this method on a small group of twelve women professionals in the field of marketing in coastal South Carolina. It includes the quantitative results of email analysis and coding, offering an overall picture with detailed charts of the participants’ SUSE use based on SUSE markers, audience, genre, and tone. This quantitative data sets the stage for more in-depth qualitative analysis and discussion in Chapter 5.

“Chapter 5: Qualitative Results and Discussion” builds upon Chapter 4 to bring contextual meaning to the quantitative data. The qualitative analysis using the methods of discourse analysis and genre analysis offer the most insight into *how* SUSE appears in workplace writing and how it relates to the rhetorical moves that professionals make in their workplace communication. As such, this chapter demonstrates how the women writers in this study write interdiscursively and provides six insights about how, through these interdiscursive moves, writers incorporate SUSE into their workplace communication. Importantly, the results and discussion of this chapter reveal a need for a pedagogical intervention into business writing curriculums at the university level.

“Chapter 6: Pedagogical Conclusions” examines the disconnect between classroom instruction and the lived experiences of professionals who communicate using a regional dialect. It offers first an examination of eight professional communication textbooks, all sold by major publishing houses, and their attention to language variety (or lack thereof) in the workplace. This mini-study reveals a gap in instructional resources that attune to the rhetorical implications of regional language in the workplace. Based on feedback from study participants and the results of this textbook review, I offer a pedagogical intervention that includes textbook support for business writing instructors and a series of genre-related assignments that support teaching regional language use in the professional communication classroom. It is my hope that this dissertation impacts the fields of composition-rhetoric, business writing, and sociolinguistics with a new method of understanding how regional dialects function as rhetorical tools of workplace writing and how that understanding may be shared with students to better prepare them for their careers after graduation.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In my introduction, I outlined how conversations in composition-rhetoric about language variety stem from the creation of Students' Right to their Own Language (SRTOL) to reject standard language ideologies, and indeed this shift in ideology has influenced how scholars in composition-rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and business writing view language difference. To reiterate, standard language ideologies are faulty at best—because they offer a prescriptive view of language use—and dangerous at worst—because they deem certain variations from that standard to be sub-par based on the social status of the speaker or writer. From a sociolinguistic perspective, there is no standard version of English (or any language) and no qualitative judgments (good or bad) can be made on a particular language variety. With an opposition to standard language ideologies as a foundation, this literature review traces the research about language variety specifically as it surfaces in the genres of business communications.

I first establish a working definition of genre and workplace genres based on current research and scaffolded by Bawarshi and Reiff's *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy*. Next, I turn attention to theories of email—the specific genre under scrutiny in this dissertation project—and its position as a conduit of other genres. Then, I examine the studies that link rhetorical style and language variation to professional, generic communication. Finally, I shift to sociolinguistic research about regional dialects in the workplace in specific and review how an examination of SUSE in

professional communication can be a move towards an acceptance of regional language varieties in line with the overarching goals of SRTOL.

Genre and Genres in the Workplace

Most discussions of genre in composition-rhetoric begin with Carolyn Miller's "Genre as Social Action." Because of its influence on subsequent genre research, it is significant in defining generic communications in the workplace and beyond. Miller argues that before 1984, when she published "Genre as Social Action," there was no common definition of genre that researchers and rhetorical theorists used for continuity. She explains, "...rhetorical genres have been defined by similarities in strategies or forms in the discourses, by similarities in audience, by similarities in modes of thinking, by similarities in rhetorical situations" (151). The disparity among these definitions led Miller to develop a more "rhetorically sound," "stable" concept of *genre* "centered not on the substance or the form of discourse, but on the action it is used to accomplish" (151). For Miller, and for countless genre studies scholars publishing since 1984, genre is a response (action) to a typified rhetorical (social) situation. More specifically, genres have meaning because they exist in social contexts, they are often identified by the rules they require for social acceptance, they are "distinct from form," they affect and influence "the substance of our cultural life," and they connect our private lives (our individual generic compositions) and our social lives (the recurrent genre category) (163). Miller's novel concept of genre that links it to rhetorical action and not to form or the conventional rules (although these exist) serves as a foundational understanding for modern genre studies today. From Miller's work—along with that of Campbell, Jamieson, Devitt, and Bazerman—Anis Bawarshi crafts the following definition of genre that informs this

dissertation: genres are “socially derived, intersubjective, rhetorical typifications that help us recognize and act within recurrent situations” (Bawarshi “Beyond” 243). Key to this definition are the three descriptors Bawarshi gives to *typifications*. They are socially derived and intersubjective (which means they are linked to discourse communities) and they are rhetorical. Linking genres to both discourse communities and rhetoric is paramount for my understanding of genres, specifically as they relate to my methodologies (see Chapter 3).

While genres exist in all aspects of life, the most important literature for this study is the generic work of business settings. In “Genre and Power,” Catherine Schryer attributes the expansive influence of Miller’s definition of *genre* to research in business writing and communication. She writes, “...it has been empirical researchers in professional communication who have most profited from and most developed Miller’s linking of genres to social contexts” (77). Bawarshi and Reiff’s *Genre: An Introduction to History, Theory, Research, and Pedagogy* provides a detailed overview of the research conducted about business genres. They separate their own literature review of generic communication in the workplace into six categories: research about how newcomers learn genres, research about how genres contribute to knowledge-making, histories of genres, research about the development of genre systems, ethnographic studies, and research about conflict and change in genres (132-150). The authors cast a wide net as they preview the studies conducted in these various categories. For the purpose of this dissertation, though, I will use three of these categories as a guide for this discussion of genre research in the workplace. Specifically, I will review studies that demonstrate (1) that genres work in systems, (2) that genres are subject to change, and (3) that genres can

be learned. Each section below will begin with the claims of Bawarshi and Reiff; I will build upon their literature review with additional texts—particularly those published within the last ten years not already included in *Genre: An Introduction*.

Genres Work in Systems

First, research in genre studies in business communication demonstrates that genres work in networks, or genre systems. Bawarshi and Reiff define genre systems as “groups of connected genres or a range of interrelated genres” (Bawarshi and Reiff 141). As writers produce genres in companies and organizations, the generic documents influence and are influenced by not only the specific organization, but by other communicative scenarios within that organization. Building upon Bawarshi and Reiff’s claim over the past ten years, several scholars—Navarro, Spinuzzi, Zachary, and Cagle—have directly addressed the interrelated nature of generic communication.

To demonstrate how a single genre works within a network of other genres, Federico Navarro offers a focused study of business plans titled “Business plan: A preliminary approach to an unknown genre.” He argues that what might be considered a single genre (the business plan or BP), is actually a combination of multiple genres merged into one final product. He writes, “...the BP simply cannot be studied without referring to the complex genre chain and family it implies...The BP proper is just the main and last phase of a genre chain with a specific chronological order...” (150). For Navarro, the business plan is the result of multiple linking genres that form the overall generic writing product.

But research in new materialist thought has provided further complexity to understanding genres as networked entities. Clay Spinuzzi’s work has been most

influential in understanding how genres work within systems and networks, and this networked concept of genres assists in understanding how genres rely on each other for meaning in specific groups of communicators and beyond. Defined by Spinuzzi and Zachry:

A *genre ecology* includes an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives. In genre ecologies, multiple genres and constituent subtasks co-exist in a lively interplay as people grapple with information technologies. (Spinuzzi and Zachry 172)

This definition of genre ecologies necessitates a stance that genres are inherently connected to organizations, time, humans, mediums, and other genres. Spinuzzi's tracing of a professional organization's genre ecology allows researchers to see this interconnected complexity of the genre's structure and relationship to other genres. Using an ecological model, rather than referencing genres as *systems*, emphasizes the complexity of genres. Different genres do not simply work together (as *genre systems* might suggest), but instead, they rely upon each other for existence and change. Spinuzzi writes, "...we may benefit greatly by tracing them [genres] across history and across organizational boundaries, understanding the genres' ecological relationships and how they have been altered" ("Tracing" 64). The act of tracing these interconnected ecologies reveals how genres serve the purposes of users and organizations over time⁶.

⁶ Spinuzzi's use of *genre ecologies* becomes most important in Chapter 3, where I return to Spinuzzi and create connections between his rhetorical view of genres and Bhatia's interdiscursivity of genres.

In *Network: Theorizing Knowledge Work in Telecommunications*, Spinuzzi expands further his concept of genre ecologies, delineating how they function and work within an organization. He argues that genre ecologies are “woven” and “spliced” (“Network” 147). They are woven because over time, genres become “stable configurations that can be conveyed to others,” and they are spliced because they allow for “opportunistic additions, innovations, and comediations” (“Network” 147). This state of being both woven and spliced gives genres the characteristic of “stability-with-flexibility” (“Network” 147). Genre ecologies provide users with a relatively fixed set of conventions that convey meaning to other users in typified ways. Yet, those conventions are not firmly set, and they are bound to be broken, altered, and improved upon. Spinuzzi’s definition of genres (expanded from Miller’s) works to include new materialist philosophies and connect conversations of genre into modern rhetorical theory (85). In doing so, Spinuzzi updates the concept of genre to allow for more complex discussions of conventions and adaptations in use in professional settings.

More recently, in 2019, Lauren Cagle published “Surveilling Strangers: The Disciplinary Biopower of Digital Genre Assemblages,” in *Computers and Composition*. Grounding her study in actor-network theory, she argues that strangershots, a visual genre of photos taken of strangers and posted online (usually on Reddit), are new “typified rhetorical action(s)” emerging from a shared purpose of “mockery of their subjects” (73). For Cagle, this genre emerged from and exists within a system: of social media, of access to digital photography apparatuses, and more. She notes, “This genre is produced not by individual rhetors, but by assemblages of human and non-human technologies,” solidifying her argument that strangershots exist within a network (69). For Cagle, any

genre works within actor-network theory and influences—and is influenced by—both human and material actants.

In short, for today's genre theorists like Spinuzzi and Cagle, a genre does not stand alone. If genres do not stand alone, a study of a genre must, therefore, include an analysis of its network. For that reason, the forthcoming study in this dissertation considers not just the artifacts (the emails) under scrutiny, but also the surrounding context of that email's composition, audience, writer, organization and purpose revealed through both the description of participants (found in Chapter 3) and in the coding methods (explained in Chapter 3 and implemented in Chapter 4).

Genres Are Subject to Change

Second, because genres operate within systems and are socially influenced, they can change over time and within varying contexts (Bawarshi and Reiff 146-150). Specifically, genre *expectations* can change and conflict, and these changes and conflicts are often influenced by broader social ideologies. Many scholars in the past ten years have further attended to the concept of changing genre conventions and expectations, including Morton, Nguyen and Miller, Chan, Bhatia, Yu and Bondi, and Zhu.

Janne Morton contends that a particular genre will change when the setting of its use changes. In “‘Adjacent worlds’: An analysis of a genre at the intersection of academic and professional communities,” she examines the “desk-crit” genre of architecture students and the nuances of its change between classroom simulation and on-the-job implementation (54). In “Exploring Business Request Genres: Students’ Rhetorical Choices” Hai Nguyen and Jennifer Miller build upon this concept, analyzing the differences in how professional writers compose business requests and how students

compose the same genre. From the results of their study of Vietnamese students and professionals, they argue that students wrote within “rigid rules” of a genre, whereas professionals saw their writing as more “flexible” (21). The fluidity of workplace writing allowed for more variation within the genre of the business request and indicated a change between the rules of a genre presented in the classroom and the application of that genre in the workplace.

Clarice S.C. Chan argues that genres change because writers and their relationship to particular genres and others in the workplace change. In “Long-term workplace communication needs of business professionals: Stories from Hong Kong senior executives and their implications for ESP and higher education,” Chan studies late-career finance professionals in Hong Kong as they use English in the business genres of emails, reports, and minutes. He writes, “The informants’ stories illustrate that multiple motives can come into play when the informants handle workplace genres, influencing their actions and the way that the texts in question are shaped” (78). For Chan, the final product of a genre changes in each situation because it is influenced by not only the writer, but that writer’s relationship to other members of the business. Furthermore, Tomlinson and Newman examine the changes between the traditional letter of recommendation and the digital letter of recommendation transferred through networking sites like LinkedIn. Using a framework based in the research of Chaïm Perelman, the researchers study the genre of the digital recommendation letter as epideictic rhetoric and examine the differences and changes between traditional letters of recommendation and their new digital counterparts (30).

Observing all the ways genres can change in the workplace prompted Vijay Bhatia to apply the term “interdiscursivity” to genre development (Bhatia “Reflections” 24). He writes, “I have noticed that within the concept of genre and professional practice, one can see expert professional writers constantly operating within and across generic boundaries creating new but essentially related and/or hybrid (both mixed and embedded) forms to give expression to their ‘private intentions’ within the socially accepted communicative practices and shared generic norms” (Bhatia “Reflections” 24). To this point, Yu and Bondi indicate in “A Genre-Based Analysis of Forward-Looking Statements in Corporate Social Responsibility Reports,” that genres consist of elements of conformity *and* non-constitutive, optional elements that vary by both culture and underlying intentions of the writer or organization (403). For Bhatia and Yu and Bondi, genres are fluid and they reveal the individual intentions of the writer, therefore they change slightly with each iteration.

Cultural norms across the globe also influence generic change in the workplace, especially in a corporate culture that is continually becoming more internationalized. Yu and Bondi additionally focus on the variations of genres as they move from culture to culture and from language to language to language; they note differences between the corporate social responsibility reports produced in English, Chinese, and Italian. Examining yet another genre—the business fax—Yunxia Zhu concludes that there are marked differences in the rhetorical moves of Chinese faxes versus those written in English and produced by New Zealanders (50). Although working within similar generic conventions, the content, tone, and rhetorical strategies changed as the genre crossed borders into another culture.

This body of research indicates that genres consistently change as they are in use; they're not static and the rules of the genre are rarely rigid. For this forthcoming study, previous research about shifting genre perspectives is important because my research examines the shifts that writers make in their language variety. Genres can allow for linguistic change as writers break the expected generic conventions in business that call for the use of Plain or Professional English in favor of SUSE. This study aims to demonstrate how that change within genres is influenced by the genre's networked status, returning specifically (in Chapter 3) to Bhatia's notion of "interdiscursivity" (Bhatia "Reflections" 24).

Genres Can Be Learned

Finally, research suggests that "novices [do] learn genres of their profession," yet there are still questions to be answered about how they are *best* learned (Bawarshi and Reiff 134). Bawarshi and Reiff demonstrate that research into genre acquisition asks the question: do those writers new to a genre learn best by instruction or participation? (Bawarshi and Reiff 134-136). Several studies offer well researched answers to this question, including those conducted by Nathan; Gindlesparger; Toth; Parkinson, Demecheleer, and Mackay; and Shafirova, Cassany, and Bach.

In "Analysing options in pedagogical business case reports: Genre, process and language," Philip Nathan conducts a study using Swalesian genre move analysis to understand how students learn to craft business reports through the options they have available and the moves they make within those options. For Nathan, not only does his model indicate that genres can be learned by practicing the choices and constraints of writing within a genre, but his framework of constraints indicates that genres do not stand

alone, but they exist within social systems and relate to both rhetorical situations and other genres (Nathan 3, 12). Gindlesparger supports the rhetorical teaching of genres in professional communication in “Writing for Non-Profits in a Professionally-Oriented Institution: Rhetorical Genre Studies to Teach Flexibility.” She argues that in order for students to understand the rhetorical nature of genres in future workplace scenarios, a pedagogical focus on flexibility in writing is of utmost importance (Gindlesparger 55). In practical application, Christopher Thoth in “Revisiting a Genre: Teaching Infographics in Business and Professional Communication Courses,” presents the sequence of analysis and production that asks students to first analyze a genre and then create one of their own to practice with the boundaries and constraints of the genre before entering the workplace. Of this sequence, he writes, “...the popularity of the genre [infographics] shows no sign of slowing in business and professional communication. Instructors need to provide students with educational experiences that will make them successful on graduation. Part of this learning should include knowing the distinction between something being aesthetically pleasing versus being rhetorically effective” (450-1). For Thoth, teaching the infographic genre through analysis and production is a way not only to help students see the rhetorical aspects of a genre, but also to prepare students for the workplace.

In 2017, Parkinson, Demecheleer, and Mackay published “Writing Like a Builder: Acquiring a Professional Genre in a Pedagogical Setting.” The researchers reviewed the writing of carpentry students as they learned the professional genre of “the builder’s diary” (29). They tracked changes in rhetorical style over time through the early training of the writers to workplace application. Parkinson, Demecheeler, and Mackay

indicate that genres are learned through practice and “explicit teaching is not necessary” (43). Instead, they suggest “coaching” and “good models” as pedagogical support for those learning new genres (43). Drawing similar conclusions, Shafirova, Cassany, and Bach postulate that genre mastery can be self-taught. In their study of one professional crafter communicating online, the participant learned to master the “specific genre of figurine description” (and in the process build an identity as a professional crafter) through self-teaching methods and unsolicited feedback from online commenters (9). This, perhaps, is a method of what Rebecca Morrison calls “teaching toward the *telos*” in “Teaching Toward the Telos of Critical Thinking: Genre in Business Communication.” Morrison says that teaching genre in the business writing classroom ultimately has the goal of teaching critical thinking so that students can, eventually, reason through new genres in the future to learn them on their own when they leave the classroom (462). That is, teaching genre leads to “cultivat[ing] transferrable critical thinking skills” (463). Though there are multiple theories about how best to teach genre, scholars agree that genre knowledge can be successfully acquired by writers.

These studies that address the teaching of genre are significant for the practical, classroom application of my forthcoming study. The goal of researching how professionals use SUSE in business communications is ultimately to bring that knowledge into the business writing classroom. If SUSE is important in professional interactions in the South, and if regional dialects are important in professional interactions more broadly, then a pedagogy that incorporates SUSE and other regional dialects would be beneficial for students learning new genres of business communications. Research suggests that genres may be learned in multiple ways; I seek

to expand that pedagogy to include instruction about how breaking generic conventions, in terms of incorporating regional dialects, may also be practiced and learned, as proposed in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

Definitions of Genre for the Study of Emails and SUSE

In the previous section, I outlined the current and historical research of three aspects of genres based on the work of Bawarshi and Reiff: (1) genres work in systems, (2) genres are subject to change, and (3) genres can be learned. These tenets are a significant foundation for studying workplace emails and the use of SUSE. In the forthcoming study, I analyze an array of emails from participants that fit certain genre categorizations—such as an email of request, for example. Yet, these genres do not stand alone, they function as responses to an action, rely on the relationship of the writer to the audience, and exist in relationship to other genres of emails. That is, each genre works interdiscursively within a system. Specifically for studying the use of SUSE within these genre systems, it is imperative to know that genre conventions are subject to change, allowing for the use of SUSE as a language variety in a genre whose conventions typically call for Plain or Professional English. And finally, previous research indicates that genres can be learned, allowing for new pedagogical practice that teaches how genres change and how SUSE can become part of a genre's conventions in some genre ecologies. To complete this framework, I must next parse out email as a genre, or as a conduit of genres.

Orality, Literacy, and Email as a Genre (or Not?)

Although I have provided the groundwork for understanding workplace genres broadly, I have yet to address the specific genre (or medium for genres) of email, which

is the focal communicative mode of this study. Defining email communication as a business genre is a contested subject that has been addressed by several scholars in composition-rhetoric and business communications. Pervading questions in the literature include: Are emails a written version of speech? Is it more like an oral communication genre or a written communication genre? Is it a new form of letter writing? Or is it a conduit for the transmission of multiple genres? The following section of this literature review provides a history of the understanding of emails and ends with a conclusion of how emails will be treated as a medium of multiple genres for this study. I will first begin with Ong's notions of orality and literacy (based in Plato), then I will transition to contemporary theories of emails and how they interact with orality and literacy to form a unique conduit that helps writers produce written (literate) generic forms with elements of oral communication.

On the Orality and Literacy of Emails

Considering emails as more akin to oral communication may be beneficial to understanding how regional dialects function in writing. Logic might follow that if emails, as quick real-time responses and less formal mediums, rely more on oral traditions, the appearance of dialectal markers might occur more frequently than they would in a business memo or formal presentation. However, this dichotic view is too simplistic an explanation for the use of regional dialects in emails; instead, a more complex and symbiotic definition of orality and literacy is necessary. Ong indicates that dialects, what he deems to be "restricted code," can appear in writing only because an oral culture exists that is shared between writer and audience (*Orality and Literacy* 104).

So how do oral cultures and literate cultures relate to one another to make space for regional dialects in professional email communication?

The ancient Greek world experienced the transition from a primarily oral culture into one of literate communication and thought between the sixth and fourth centuries BCE (Bizzell and Herzberg 20). In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Bizzell and Herzberg demonstrate that the culture moved from one of orality with its own set of characteristics—such as parataxis, concrete imagery, ritualized references to authority, and agonistic posture—to literacy with an altogether different set of characteristics—such as hypotaxis, the appeal to reason over emotion, text-assisted memory, and abstract thought (20). During this transition, Plato was skeptical of the rise of writing over oral communication and rhetoric. Via the character of Socrates, he writes in *Phaedrus*:

Indeed writing, Phaedrus, doubtless has this feature that is terribly clever, and truly resembles painting. For the offspring of that art stand there as living beings, but if you ask them about something, they altogether keep a solemn silence. And likewise, speeches do the same. For you would think that they speak with some understanding, but if you ask something about the things said, wishing to learn, it indicates some one thing only, and always the same. And when it's been once written, every speech rolls around everywhere, alike by those who understand as in the same way by those for whom it is in no way fitting, and it does not know to whom it ought to speak and to whom not. And when it suffers offense and is reviled without justice it always needs its father's assistance. For by itself it cannot defend or assist itself. (Plato 274e)

Plato criticizes the stagnancy of writing and its inability to interact effectively with varying audiences. This critique reveals Plato's distrust of writing as a means of rhetorical communication, arguing that it cannot keep up with the "give-and-take" necessary for productive conversation and argumentation (Ong 78). Certainly, Plato did not envision the give-and-take possible with computer-mediated communication, such as emails, and out of this ancient critique of orality and literacy, modern scholars have attempted to bridge the gap between orality and literacy in the realm of digital communication.

In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong writes directly in his introduction, "The subject of this book is the differences between orality and literacy" (1). However, upon reading the full text, his purposes are much more nuanced. Ong does not merely seek to delineate between oral and literate communication, but oral and literate *cultures*—those that rely only on spoken traditions (orality) and those that rely too on written texts (literacy). Specifically, Ong links orality and literacy with modern technology. Beginning with Plato's critique of literacy (quoted above), he transposes "writing" for "technology" and "computers" to demonstrate that Plato's critique of writing is similar to modern critiques of technology (78). Attempting to resolve the critique, Ong argues for writing as a technology and a way of "technologizing" the world (79). For Ong, the advent of writing did not replace orality, but transformed it and in the process created a new, secondary orality. He writes, "It initiated what print and computers only continue, the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent pace, the separation of the word from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist" (81). In this way, Ong references the orality-literacy dichotomy as "dynamics" to demonstrate not only the two terms' distinctions, but also

their interactions (176). For Ong, the advent of technology—television and radio specifically—ushered in this secondary orality, which is oral communication with a foundation in written communication (133). Today, secondary orality exists in our computer-mediated technologies that rely on both oral communication and written, literate communication to convey messages between interlocutors. In short, literacy and orality, especially in modern digital culture, rely on each other to propel communication.

In 1998, Bruce Lionel Mason examined Plato's orality and literacy in tandem with the work of Ong in "E-Texts: The Orality and Literacy Issue Revisited" in hopes of demonstrating that email communication is both an oral and literate medium. Mason writes, "My intent is to examine how computer-mediated communication displays both oral and literate characteristics, thus exploding the reductionist arguments sometimes posited in oral/literate dichotomies" (307). While his goal to "explode" other arguments is intriguing, what follows in his ethnographic study maintains the binary; email is just "both" ends of it (307). Mason seeks to apply Ong's oral psychodynamics to computer-mediated communication, relying on the assumption that his audience believes email is a primarily written communication, to demonstrate the oral nature of the text on the screen. His straightforward argument was perhaps revolutionary for its publication time in 1998, but more modern conceptions reveal a complexity left unconsidered in Mason's piece that takes into account the networked status of email communications 23 years later.

Providing a more nuanced, complex approach to email communication based in a historical study of letters, both Joyce R. Walker in "Letter Writing in the Late Age of Print: Electronic Mail and the *Ars Dictaminia*" and Esther Milne in "Letters, Postcards, Email: Technologies of Presence" offer discussions of email communication in terms of

interconnected orality and literacy. Walker postulates that emails are a modern “letter-writing form” that exists at the “boundary between written and spoken communication” that can “claim an incorporation of aspects of both written and spoken communication” (231). In Walker’s interpretation, emails are a form of written communication that integrates characteristics of oral communication (such as rapid response and less formal language) onto the screen of written text (232). Milne builds on Walker’s positioning of emails between orality and literacy to reveal that past scholarship in composition, linguistics, and education have “attempted to determine whether the language of email is akin to speech or writing or whether it occupies a midpoint on a continuum between spoken and written language” (173). Both authors, Walker and Milne, work within the framework of an orality-literacy binary, attempting to navigate the “gray area between writing and speaking” (Walker 232). The tradition of theorizing orality and literacy has been one of dichotomies and binaries, seeking to position the two concepts in relationship to each other. Perhaps, though, this is problematic.

Theories of Complicating Orality, Literacy, and Email Communication

Theories and research by Heidegger and Katz and Rhodes lend yet another, more nuanced depiction of computer mediated communication. Heidegger’s concept of enframing, coupled with Katz and Rhodes’s postulation that the self and technology are inseparable, further complicates the relationship between orality and literacy in emails. For Heidegger, “The essence of technology has colonized the very way we understand the world—the meaning of things around the way we see the world, the way we experience value, and more besides. As Heidegger claims, technology *enframes* us. It constitutes the window through which we experience everything” (Wisniewski 149).

Heidegger's technological enframing is humans' predispositions to see all of being, nature, and technology as instrumental resources (that is, "standing-reserve") for our use (Heidegger 23). In this enframing, man cannot experience only himself any more than he can move beyond thought processes associated with enframing. Heidegger writes, "...precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself...Man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of Enframing that he does not apprehend Enframing as a claim...and thus *can never* encounter only himself" (Heidegger 27). Put simply, enframing—that is ordering, that is viewing the world as resources in standing reserve—influences and affects how humans *think* and how humans *are*.

But what does enframing have to do with orality and literacy in email communications? Previous research and theories (such as those of Mason, Walker, and Milne) about orality and literacy in computer-mediated communication have primarily focused on (1) ordering (that is, delineating between the features of orality and literacy) and (2) oral communication and literate communication as resources standing in reserve for the writer to take up and incorporate into communicative moments. Considering these two concepts within enframing poses the risk of "concealing" (Heidegger 27). Heidegger claims, "Enframing...banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing" (27). The ordering of orality and literacy, and the urge to think of these two terms as distinct categories (or even two ends of a spectrum) conceals the complexity of the concepts, especially in reference to email communications. Considering emails as an extension of the individual can assist in understanding the concepts' complexity and allow us to move

slightly outside of a perspective skewed by enframing to a more nuanced “revealing” of how digital communication works, specifically through emails (Heidegger 27).

For Heidegger, all digital communication is an extension of the self. Katz and Rhodes, however, investigate specifically what it means for emails to be an extension of the self in relation to Heidegger’s concepts of enframing, concealing, and revealing. In “Beyond Ethical Frames of Technical Relations: Digital Being in the Workplace World,” they write:

The body is conceptually and physically becoming digital technology...Whether we like it or not, digital communication has become an extension of ourselves, increasingly projecting our consciousness outward so that our image becomes the medium of our existence and the object of our gaze. (240-241)

For Katz and Rhodes (as with Heidegger), the individual can no longer separate himself from technology, as it pervades every aspect of life and being. Turning specifically to email communication, Katz and Rhodes postulate that digital communication, specifically emails for their study, are extensions of the self. Not only does computer-mediated communication reveal “glimpses of individual personalities in the course of ‘transmission,’” but it is also “a projection and extension of self” (242). Because of this status as an extension of self, email is related to both accomplishing tasks and personal expression.

The understanding of email communication as part of an individual poses problems for considering that communication to be either oral or literate—or even categorizing it as both—because human interaction cannot be evenly codified as oral or literate (especially so because modern communicators using email live in literate

cultures). Returning to Ong, his characterization of orality and literacy is primarily a cultural understanding; that is, he is not analyzing specific speech events, but the communication capacity of a society. For Ong, orality and literacy are dependent on each other, and writing, specifically, cannot exist without orality. He explains, “Writing can never dispense with orality...we can style writing a ‘secondary modeling system,’ dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language. Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality” (8). In his engagement with deconstruction, Ong further writes, “Without textualism, orality cannot even be identified; without orality, textualism is rather opaque...” (Ong 166). Although he is still working within the binary terms, trying to understand and analyze the two, Ong demonstrates that the relationship between orality and literacy is co-reliant. When we think of literacy and orality *not* as two separate entities, but as fully co-reliant, it becomes complicated to deem emails to be either oral or literate because the composer, living in a literate society, must be consistently drawing upon literacy *as it is dependent upon* orality.

This complexity problematizes the boxing of emails into the categories of oral or literate, or leaning on a case that emails are oral, and therefore perhaps more likely to include markers of regional dialect. Instead, emails must be considered for both their use of “restricted linguistic code” (that is, oral characteristics such as dialect) and “elaborate linguistic code” (common language developed specifically for writing) (Ong 104). Ong demonstrates, “The restricted linguistic code is evidently largely oral in origin and use and, like oral through and expression generally, operates contextually, close to the human life-world...The elaborated code is one which is formed with the necessary aid of writing,

and for full elaboration, of print” (104-5). In emails, especially those that express both the restricted linguistic code (dialect and language variety such as SUSE) and the elaborated code (mainstream written language or Plain English), the author relies on both oral and literate traditions.

Email as a Genre

If they draw from characteristics of both orality and literacy, does that make emails categorizable as a distinct genre? That is, could we gather a set of conventions (both from oral genres and written genres) that encapsulate email as a genre and that take into account the complexities between orality and literacy? And do their combined oral and literate traits make emails a specific genre? This, too, is not as straightforward as it may initially seem. In a study of weblogs, Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd consider that while weblogs have some similar characteristics, their content varies widely, making the weblog a genre that houses other types of genres (7-8). Similarly, most emails hold some overlapping structural characteristics, specifically business emails. Most have a direct address and a signature, and all are transmitted via the internet using some form of web application (such as Outlook, Apple Mail, Gmail, etc.). However, the generic conventions vary widely based on the content.

In 1996, Michael Spooner and Kathleen Yancey took up this question of emails in *College Composition and Communication* with “Postings on a Genre of Email.” In the unconventional article, the scholars offer a conversation that debates the status of emails, whether literate, oral, a genre of its own, or a receptacle for multiple genres. The authors begin with descriptions of the “dimensions” of email: email is “simple” like writing a letter, email can exist on “lists,” email has a place in the “classroom,” email can be a

“resource” and a “mode of collaboration” (254-255). However, they quickly problematize these distinct descriptions, noting that it is much easier to categorize emails “in theory than in practice” (255). Spooner and Yancey’s conversation moves to an attempt to understand how emails function as genres. They write:

I want to argue that what email writers are doing on the net does not in essence or in genre differ from what writers do offline. In some cases, it looks like a business letter. Sometimes it’s a bulletin, sometimes a broadside, sometimes a joke, a memo, a graffito, a book...Just like paper and ink, this technology allows a wide range of genres. *That’s* the point. (259)

The authors then problematize this notion that email is like pen and ink by pointing to the oral aspects of email or its ability to be conversational. In the end, they postulate that email may either be a “genre-in-the-making” or a medium for “reproducing extant genres of writing instead of creating new ones” (268, 270). Despite still lacking a consensus on the genre of email, the two authors agree that it is a “genre of chaos” (272). They rightly speculate that “Eventually—perhaps within a decade—electronic writing and publication will be boringly normal” (273). While I’d like to think electronic writing and publication have become normal, I hope (for the sake of this dissertation) it is not “boringly” so (273). Looking back on the progress over the past 25 years, it seems as though electronic writing as the modern-day normal means of communication has absorbed the intricacies of various writing genres.

As time has passed since this piece’s publication in 1996, email has not definitively emerged as a genre of its own. In “Long-term workplace communication needs of business professionals: Stories from Hong Kong senior executives and their

implications for ESP and higher education,” Chan writes, “As the findings show, both ‘reports’ and ‘emails’ have a range of different communicative purposes” (78). That is, these two forms of communication (email included) offer the ability to communicate multiple purposes or multiple genres. Today, and for the purposes of this study, email functions as a conduit for multiple genres, with features of both orality and literacy reliant upon each other. Emails act as speedy back-and-forth modes of multifaceted conversational communication *and* mediums for many workplace genres previously communicated on paper—the formal request, the informal request, the memo, etc. The duality of emails with characteristics of both orality and literacy, combined with the ability for emails to house multiple genres, offers users with a platform upon which to creatively play with generic conventions. This play, particularly in regard to language and SUSE, finds a scholastic home in the study of rhetorical style. The next section of this literature review turns our attention to rhetorical style within workplace genres, drawing connections between spoken and written style and the genres produced via email.

Rhetorical Style and Language Variety in Workplace Genres

Questions of language variation—in speech, in writing, in genres—find a scholastic base in the rhetorical canon of style. Jeanne Fahnestock writes in *Rhetorical Style: The Uses of Language in Persuasion*, “Despite the rich and enduring legacy of rhetorical approaches to style, many if not most scholars who analyze language today do not in fact consciously draw on the rhetorical tradition” (9). She continues to state that most contemporary scholars of language draw upon various branches of linguistics to enhance their studies, but to make conversations of linguistic features of style relevant to the field of rhetoric, we must consider the roots our arguments have in the rhetorical

tradition. While this dissertation will, too, lean on linguistic research in language variation, it has a clear foundation in rhetorical study.

Significance of Rhetorical Style and Language Variation in Business Communications

Since ancient times, rhetoricians have been concerned with how ways of speaking affect argumentation. Each rhetorical treatise includes a section about style that indicates there are manners of speaking appropriate for various rhetorical situations and types of argumentation. For instance, Aristotle explains, “For it is not enough to know what we ought to say; we must also say it as we ought” (*Rhetoric* 164). He pushes for successful rhetoric to be correct, “clear,” “appropriate,” and not overly “adorned” (167). Cicero (in Book 3, Chapter 10 of *De Oratore*) and Quintilian (in Book 1, Chapter 5 of *Institutio Oratoria*), too, tout these elements as essential to successful rhetoric. Quintilian notes that “Style has three kinds of excellence: correctness, lucidity, and elegance” (79). Even through the 1960s, rhetorical textbooks touted these stylistic characteristics. In *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student*, Corbett and Connors write, “And if rhetorical prose must communicate, it follows that it must, above all, be clear” (345). What most rhetoricians through history agree upon, though, is that style is not “simply ‘the dress of thought’” (Corbett and Connors 338). Instead, style lends meaning and depth to an argument, affecting how it is received and perceived by audiences.

Butler’s *Style in Rhetoric and Composition: A Critical Sourcebook* offers a contemporary depiction of style in rhetoric and composition that builds upon this classical foundation. The authors featured in Butler’s edited collection seek to study style, specifically as it works rhetorically. Drawing on the work of the Sophists in “Ancient and Contemporary Compositions that ‘Come Alive’: Clarity as Pleasure, Sound as Magic,”

TR Johnson links stylistic choice with audience awareness (364). Kathryn Flannery further demonstrates that style is embedded within and determined by culture, and she argues, “A study of style needs to pay attention to what has been and what continues to be at stake in struggles for cultural authority” (385). Finally, Richard Lanham links style with substance in his article “Style/Substance Matrix,” putting “style and substance into relationships that are as complex as human reality” (488). While the articles in this text do not point directly to professional communications, they provide a theoretical framework in which to view language variation as inherently rhetorical through the canon of style, concerned with audience, culturally determined, and inseparable from substance.

With this contemporary theoretical framework of style, modern language variation may be added to the discussion. Language variation, as a subset of style, holds a similar importance in argumentation. Butler explains that “difference in various dialects” is “inextricably linked to the idea of variation as a fundamental aspect of style” (“Style and the Public” 399). If rhetorical style is an integral part of the rhetorical canon and the effectiveness of argumentation, the language one chooses to use, and the variation of that language, also weighs significantly on an argument’s construction. Fahnestock states explicitly, “What is the rhetorical payoff for attention to language varieties? The use of a particular level, dialect, or register can indicate a rhetor’s awareness of the language appropriate to a subject, situation, and audience” (86). If linguistic variation and style play a significant role in rhetorical acuity, as Butler and Fahnestock indicate, what are their influences on the rhetoric of business and professional communications?

To answer this question, I lean on the foundational work of Bakhtin in *The Problem of Speech Genres* and return to a previously discussed work by Katz and

Rhodes. In *The Problem of Speech Genres*, Bakhtin demonstrates that genres of speech are marked by the style used to communicate those genres; for him, “any utterance...is individual and therefore can reflect the individuality of the speaker (or writer); that is, it possesses individual style” (1229). However, he creates a caveat for business communication, arguing that generic forms reject “individuality in language” in “business documents” (1229). In the genres of business communication, “the individual style does not enter into the intent of the utterance, does not serve as its only goal, but is, as it were, an epiphenomenon of the utterance, one of its by-products” (1229). Bakhtin demonstrates that business communication genres can restrict individuality (in favor of an organizational ethos or voice) and push out the writer or speaker’s style with rigid conventions, or, if that individual style does appear, it is unintentional or secondary.

On the other hand, Katz and Rhodes take a different stance about style in business communications built on the work and philosophies of Habermas and Heidegger. In “Beyond Ethical Frames of Technical Relations: Digital Being in the Workplace World,” the authors use the concept of ethical frames to connect professional writing (particularly emails) to human relationships with technology. They write that digital communications are “projection[s] and extension[s] of self” and that emails represent “a technical mode of being, encompassing both task-based purpose and personal expression in technological relations” (242). While Katz and Rhodes do not specifically mention rhetorical style or language variation, they link digital communications in the workplace with expressions of selfhood (which, I believe, would include dialects and language choices). On a more theoretical level, they transition business writing from merely a dry, instrumental task to one that reveals the intricacies of human personalities acting within social and

professional settings and within organizations (in a move that, perhaps, would satisfy Bakhtin's critique of the impersonality of business genres).

Contemporary Research in Rhetorical Style and Business Communication: Gaps and Broad Gestures in the Past Decade

Contemporary scholars have rarely addressed English language varieties in the genres of business communication within the past ten years as they relate to rhetorical stylistics, and this scholarship is sorely needed to understand how dialects function rhetorically within business communications. As recently as 2017, scholars were still calling for researchers in these fields to study language choice as it rhetorically affects business communications. Speaking specifically of social media language use, Hannah and Lam indicate that future research is needed in the language styles used by businesses in "Drawing From Available Means: Assessing the Rhetorical Dimensions of Facebook Practice." They write:

...we see a lot of opportunity in studying additional language variables used in the [Facebook] posts. Performing a qualitative analysis would allow researchers to assess how variables like word choice, word count, and style affect engagement. In addition, qualitatively assessing the language in a post would open the door to examining the nature of audience response to a post, that is, positive, negative, or neutral, and thus provide further insight into the dynamics of Facebook interaction. (254)

Hannah and Lam indicate that attunement to language use could help better identify how audiences engage with and respond to a business's or author's or linguistic choices. Their call urges researchers to pay attention to language and reveals a gap in scholarship about

language use in business communication scholarship. Despite this gap, several researchers *do* offer more general insight into rhetorical style's function within business communication genres.

In 2010, Dale Cyphert published "The Rhetorical Analysis of Business Speech: Unresolved Questions" in the *Journal of Business Communication*, and he opens the decade with his stance on rhetorical stylistics. Specifically, he addresses the question: "Is there a discernible style of business rhetoric?" (355). He answers that the maxim to be "clear, concise, and direct" is very much still the directive for business writers, but he qualifies this statement with an understanding that most questions of style in professional communication require an answer of "it depends" (Cyphert 355). He adds:

The pedagogical question as to a discernable style of business *grammar* can be readily answered; the expectations of clear, concise and direct language are well documented (Kallendorf & Kallendorf, 1985). The question of rhetorical *style*, however, deserves greater attention. Not only can greater attention to style locate more effective ways to reach the unique goals of business rhetoric (Kallendorf & Kallendorf, 1985), but it is through a critical study of rhetorical style that we are able to learn about a discourse community's beliefs, examining their "stylistic proclivities" to uncover "the qualities of mental life" of which those proclivities are tokens (Black, 1976, p. 85). (Cyphert 355-6, emphasis mine)

Cyphert delineates between a grammatical call for clarity and concision and a rhetorical call for adaptability. In parsing out these differences, he demonstrates the significance of rhetorical style in business communications and its ability not only to reveal characteristics of the speaker (or writer), but to offer insight into businesses and how they

operate. He adds, “Examination of a discernable style of business rhetoric could lead us to ask a host of questions about the moral character, epistemological presumptions, and social relationships inherent in the business community” (355). For Cyphert, grammar and style are theoretically separate entities—one calling for rigid textbook definitions of clarity and concision and the other calling for innovation and flexibility.⁷

Like orality and literacy, grammar and rhetorical style cannot be so easily separated. Put simply, grammar is the backbone of rhetorical style—those word-level, sentence-level moves that impact argumentation and sway audiences—as Fahnestock argues when she writes that there are “features of language that might enhance [an argument’s] power over audiences” (6). Although Cyphert’s separation of grammar and rhetorical style offers an important call to attune to rhetorical stylistic analysis, it misses the importance of grammar (semantics, lexicon, syntax, etc.) as an influential aspect of rhetorical style⁸. Contemporary research over the past decade has conflated language-level choices, grammar, and rhetorical style and studied how these elements function within generic business communications. Specifically, as demonstrated in the paragraphs below, research shows that (1) specific grammatical choices, (2) linguistic variation in a

⁷ Bakhtin and Bawarshi make similar distinctions between grammar and rhetorical style. Bakhtin, in “The Problem of Speech Genres,” differentiates between sentences (grammar) and utterances (performed rhetorical style). For Bakhtin, the utterance is how and when the sentence is performed, and that performance is shaped by the rhetorical situation. Building on Bakhtin’s argument, Bawarshi, too, makes this distinction between the grammar of a genre and the performance of a genre. To argue for a view of genre that meshes with translingual theories, he writes, “Genre agency is more than just knowing genre conventions explicitly or even critically; it needs to involve more than knowing the ‘grammar’ of a genre. We need to extend genre agency to include knowledge of strategic genre performances in space and time, within asymmetrical relations of power” (Bawarshi “Beyond” 245-6).

⁸ See Fahnestock’s *Rhetorical Style*, “Introduction”

single language, (3) variation between languages, and (4) breaking stylistic conventions all affect rhetorical writing and communication in the workplace in varying ways. Furthermore, research focused on rhetorical style in workplace writing and speaking attunes to the limitations placed on stylistic choices by technology. Contrary to the rigid rules of business genres that Bakhtin references, today's scholars demonstrate that rhetorical style plays a keen role in the communication of professionals.

Some researchers have linked specific grammatical choices to rhetorical style in the workplace. For instance, Maria Isaksson and Poul Erik Flyvholm Jørgensen draw an explicit connection between language and rhetorical style and a business's ethos, specifically of PR agencies. Grammar and rhetorical style, according to Isaksson and Jørgensen, have direct impacts on the audience's empathy and credibility (125). The word choices, that is the grammatical features, work to enhance the rhetorical argument. Susan Conrad, too, studies the connection between grammar and rhetorical style via the use of passive voice in the writing of engineers in "The Use of Passives and Impersonal Style in Civil Engineering Writing." She—in a corpus analysis study—marks the significance of stylistic choices for specific genres (which she references as "registers"), such as practitioner reports and journal articles (40). Conrad demonstrates that passive voice does not indicate a sloppy move from the standard or expected⁹; instead, it serves the specific purpose of turning the reader's focus away from humans performing actions to the objects and how they should move and function. Furthermore, the passive constructions in engineering genres increase reading comprehension and knowledge

⁹ Working as an editorial assistant for *Composition Studies*, removing passive voice is still an edit I frequently see on manuscript drafts.

transfer (65). In this study, even small changes in grammar at the sentence-level mark rhetorical, stylistic competence.

Language variety as an aspect of rhetorical style affects business communication genres. In a corpus analysis of sustainability reports, Nils Smeuninx, Bernard De Clerck, and Walter Aerts, argue that language variety plays a key role in the readability of the reports (58). They explain, "...language variety deserves more attention as a determinant of sustainability report readability, but also shows a great relative effect size for number of passive constructions, suggesting that language variety can have a greater impact than company performance even in cases where we find evidence for obfuscation" (77). For Smeuninx, et. al., language variety (in this case between Englishes spoken in the United States, the UK, Australia, Europe, and India) at the word, vocabulary, and grammar level influences the ability for a document to be both readable and rhetorically effective. More broadly speaking, even the language choices of rhetors (French versus English, for instance) affect their audiences (not just variations within one language—midwestern English versus SUSE, for instance). Both Jos Hornikx, Frank van Meurs, and Anja de Boer in "English or a Local Language in Advertising? The Appreciation of Easy and Difficult English Slogans in the Netherlands" and Katharina Barkley in "The Impact of CEO Ethnicity and Language Choice on Crisis Communication in Japan" offer insight about how language choice affects audiences. For Hornikx et. al., audiences prefer language that is easy to understand, and for Barkley, Japanese audiences responded most favorably to foreign CEOs speaking Japanese, as it increased the ethos of the speaker as he or she attempted to identify with the audience.

The breaking of conventions, too, at the stylistic level affects how audiences interact with genres. Using rhetorical genre analysis to study academic job market rejection letters, Luke Thominet concludes that, in this genre, it is more effective to break away from the typified conventions of rhetorical style. Readers of these job rejection letters responded more positively to the writer when that writer did not invoke the expected language and phrases of the genre (29). Contrarily, Sofie Decock, Bernard De Clerck, and Rebecca Van Herek argue that audiences of another genre—complaint refusal responses—express no difference in reception when receiving a decontextualized “textbook” response versus one that breaks the conventions in favor of a more personal tone (11). More research is still needed to understand how breaking stylistic generic conventions can affect professional audiences.

In digital communication, contemporary researchers are keenly aware of the constraints placed upon rhetorical style by the computer systems used to create documents. In “Rhetorical Work in the Age of Content Management: Implications for the field of Technical Communication,” Rebekka Andersen attests that those who create content management (CM) systems (including the guidelines that govern them) rely on the principles of rhetorical style to develop CM standards. The creators of CM systems control the language and style of future users; they are “the masterminds of their organization’s content strategy, which, in all its stages of development and implementation, requires rhetorical decisions concerning invention, arrangement, *style*, memory, and delivery...” (138, emphasis mine). For the purpose of Andersen’s study, language variation is constrained by the delivery method (the CM system) and determined by the creator of that system. Additionally, in an examination of African

American Twitter use in “The Professional Work of ‘Unprofessional’ Tweets: Microblogging Career Situations in African American Hush Harbors,” Douglas M. Walls explains, “To constrain individual’s resistances, organizations, along with other institutions, often implement technology that seeks to control communication by limiting tactical rhetorical options through standardization” (393). While the digital systems in use may restrict some linguistic variation and rhetorical stylistic choices, the consensus among scholars remains that rhetorical style plays a key role in the development of both a company’s rhetorical stance and an individual professional’s rhetorical effectiveness.

What this research clearly demonstrates is that language choices and stylistics are important for understanding the rhetorical movements of business communications. In the more distant past, the generic conventions for writing in professional settings were fairly rigid, yet in the past ten years, research has demonstrated that more rhetorical flexibility is essential for interpersonal connections within businesses and between companies and their customers. In “The Technical Communicator as (Post-Modern) Discourse Worker,” Greg Wilson and Rachel Wolford reveal a desire to move professional communicators out of their “stifling roles as transmitters and translators of communication” into a more discourse-centered position that reflects the context of humans within organizations and away from “institutional regulation of language practices” (12, 18). With such a goal in place, the realm of business communication can become receptive to the use of SUSE and other dialects of English in the workplace. As Hannah and Lam indicate, more research is needed in this area to determine how professionals are *already* implementing SUSE and other dialects of English in their business communications to achieve their own rhetorical goals.

Leaning on Linguistics: Uses of Regional Dialects in the Workplace

While the research in composition-rhetoric and business communication focuses broadly on rhetorical style and language use, I lean primarily on the theories of sociolinguists to craft an understanding of *how* regional dialects function in workplace genres. Despite much research on the use, changes, and descriptions of regional dialects¹⁰, studies that situate that research in the workplace are scarce and often located in scholarly journals outside the linguistic community, even though they draw support and inspiration from sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, this fragmented body of research that examines regional dialect use within workplace settings is imperative for understanding how those dialects affect the rhetorical moves of professionals.

A Foundation for Study from Robert Mai and Stefan Hoffman

Robert Mai and Stefan Hoffman, in “Accents in Business Communication: An Integrative Model and Propositions for Future Research,” provide the most robust review of regional dialect use in the workplace. Citing an interdisciplinary approach that combines research from the fields of business, economics, psychology, and sociolinguistics, they examine the effects of accents on spoken language in professional communication. They identify three “consequences” of accent use in the workplace:

First, accents influence consumer judgments about a wide range of speaker characteristics, such as competence, social attractiveness and personal integrity.

Second, accents influence the perception of the company's message (e.g.,

¹⁰ A full analysis of the uses, changes, and descriptions of SUSE specifically will be located in Chapter 3 and accompany the creation of the email inbox search terms for the study. There are few articles that explicitly examine SUSE in workplace settings; for that reason, this subsection includes research about regional dialects in the workplace more broadly.

attention and attitudes towards the ad). Third, there are effects on actual consumer behavior (e.g., purchases). (141)

These consequences are directly related to the accent use of the speaker in a professional setting. Mai and Hoffman contend that the degree of difference of the speaker from the mainstream correlates with the negative intensity of these consequences.

Furthermore, Mai and Hoffman explain that there are three main “effects” on professional audience members when they hear a regional accent: the vampire effect¹¹, the suppression effect, and the moderators of speech processing effects (149-50). The vampire effect occurs when a regional accent causes the audience to pay more attention to the speaker (because the language deviates from the norm), but the difference in language hinders comprehension. They explain that “the accent distracts the receiver from processing the central message” (149). In the suppression effect, regional accents work to “suppress” the audience’s cognitive abilities to form counterarguments against a message or supportive arguments for a message because the audience is distracted from the message by the accent (150). Finally, the “moderators of speech processing effects” encompass those aspects of the rhetorical situation that influence the audience’s ability to process the message, including “accent strength,” “length of communication,” and “speech quality” (150-1). Indirectly, Mai and Hoffman invoke the rhetorical relationship between audience and speaker and the ethos that a regional dialect builds for the speaker if the audience identifies with it.

¹¹ Mai and Hoffman do not fully explain why this is called the “vampire” effect, but that is what they label it.

Mai and Hoffman draw a sharp distinction between regional and foreign accents for the purpose of professional communication. They write that there is a significant difference between regional and foreign accents: “Speakers with a foreign accent are most likely from a different language community than their counterpart, whereas speakers with a regional accent can either differ from or match the listener’s regional and socio-economic background” (146). Identification with the audience is key to the success of a business, according to Mai and Hoffman. The authors, overall, present a negative view of difference in accent in the workplace—the stronger the accent, the more negative the consequences. However, additional research identifies that this may not be the case; difference may, instead, have positive consequences for business interactions.

Problematizing Mai and Hoffman: A More Optimistic Approach

Three research articles from a sociolinguistic tradition offer further details about how spoken regional dialects function in workplace communication in positive ways: Elizabeth Eustace’s “Speaking allowed? Workplace regulation of regional dialect,” Heiko Wiggers’s “Wij proat ock Platt: Professional Register and Regional Dialect,” and Lauren Hall-Lew and Nola Stephens’s “Country Talk.” Each article examines a regional dialect (Scots-English, Low German, and Country Talk, respectively) and how it influences speakers professionally, many times positively, despite the hurdles and consequences Mai and Hoffman outline.

Working from an ethno-linguistic perspective studying the regional dialects of Glasgow, Scotland, Eustace argues that the correction of dialect use in the workplace suppresses the identity of workers and decreases productivity and morale. She writes:

The data show sociolinguistically complex sites of struggle exist for speakers when corporate objectives in dialect performance demand a linguistic habitus from employees that is not their own. Organizations do not promote speakers' interests if the quality of an interaction can be evaluated on their dialect, or attitudinal judgements on its expressive quality. (343)

Eustace's ultimate goal is to decrease the stereotypes against Scots-English in Glasgow, vying for a business environment and management structure that is more welcoming of the dialect.

Writing with less of a call for social justice and more with the purpose of describing dialect use in professional settings, Wiggers presents the results of a 2012 study of "Low German" use in business settings (31). The author suggests that although Low German is considered to be reserved only for familial or social settings, it is still a prevalent dialect in professional communication. The results of his study show that Low German varieties "are able to fulfill the intricate communicative purposes of a professional register" (55). In "Country Talk," sociolinguists Hall-Lew and Stephens argue that certain regional dialects are inseparable from specific workplaces and occupations—"cowboys, farmers, and ranchers" (257). From a study of ten participants in Texoma (a fictional town on the Oklahoma-Texas border) and their relationship to "Country Talk," the authors conclude, "the use of Country Talk is valuable linguistic capital for claiming local membership in a region sitting on the border of two states and multiple dialect areas" (275). For the businesses of this area, local membership is imperative for the community to thrive and for the ranches and farms to thrive; regional

language helps to solidify that membership. Each of these authors demonstrate the use of dialect to be significant for rhetorical communication. Eustice, specifically, urges readers to consider social justice in the discussion of dialect use in the workplace, and her call for equality leads to a segment of research that pays shrewd attention to the injustices of linguistic discrimination.

Linguistic Discrimination and a Move Toward SUSE in Business Writing Genres

For this portion of this literature review, I seek to focus on a particular line of thought and the research that supports it: linguistic discrimination exists in the workplace, code-switching is a way that speakers of vernaculars function in professional settings, and code-meshing¹² complicates the need to code-switch and seeks to bring varieties of English into all aspects of culture (including the workplace). Eustice demonstrates that linguistic inequality exists in Glasgow, Scotland, postulating that the dialect of Glasgow is “illustrative” of “dialect discrimination” (332). She concludes her article, “Speaking allowed? Workplace Regulation of Regional Dialect,” with a call for managers to embrace their employees’ Scots-English speech:

A change in employer attitudes might bring about a social change that recognizes ethno-linguistic diversity and avoids indirect discrimination... A change of agenda needs to be considered, acknowledging the role played by past

¹² Much of the research conducted about code-meshing (notably by Vershawn Ashanti Young) is directly related to African American Vernacular English (AAVE), but the concepts developed in Young’s research do speak to other marginalized dialects (such as Spanglish, Southern American English, and Pittsburgese (studied by Johnstone)). In expanding the function of code-meshing, however, I want to be clear that my aim is *not* to diminish the social justice work Young is doing for the African American community, as it is vital work in our racialized culture, or to imply that other dialects are *just as* marginalized as AAVE, as that is not a balanced comparison.

discrimination and subordination which produced marginalized groups and is now surfacing as the socioeconomic base moves from industry to service work. For instance, if Scots language was recognized by employers, speakers would have linguistic rights; but because its status is ambiguous, discrimination is given legitimacy. (343-4)

Eustice connects dialect discrimination with the political and social status of the Scots and urges for a change to squelch that discrimination in favor of more equitable work environments for Glaswegians.

Linguistic discrimination is not limited geographically to Glasgow, and the users of regional dialects face similar discrimination across the globe and in the United States. Judgments are regularly made about identities based on how someone speaks or writes, and ideologies about language carry over into the workplace. Rosina Lippi-Green, in *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology, and Discrimination in the United States*, asks, “How widespread is language-focused discrimination?” (157). She answers by citing a study (among several others) conducted by the Accounting Office of the United States Government that indicated “10 percent of their sample, or 461,000 companies employing millions of persons, openly, if not naively, admit that they ‘discriminate on the basis of a person’s foreign appearance or accent’” (Lippi-Green 157). Lippi-Green holds that discrimination based on linguistic difference happens regularly in the workplace, primarily because our culture holds to a “standard language ideology” of English that is founded on the myth that a “standard” can even really exist (157)¹³.

¹³ See Chapter 1 for a full explanation of standard language ideologies.

More recent studies, too, indicate that linguistic discrimination is alive and well in the workplace. In “Accents in Business Communication: An Integrative Model and Propositions for Future Research,” Mai and Hoffman identify the stereotypes and prejudices associated with regional accents and indicate that they can negatively “influence business-relevant outcome variables” (147). Citing Giles and Lippi-Green, Mai and Hoffman write that accents with less social prestige garner more negative effects from stereotyping. Dialects lacking prestige can lead to ostracism in the workplace, as Mao, Liu, Jiang, and Zhang argue in “Why am I ostracized and how would I react? — A review of workplace ostracism research.” They write, “Dialects are sometimes used as cues to determine whether a person is recognized as in-group or out-group members. We believe such membership categorization is strongly related to workplace ostracism” (760). Additionally, analyzing one study participant’s (Gina’s) Tweets that discuss a workplace incident about her hair written in African American English, Douglas M. Walls explains, “Labeling such topics and language as unprofessional, Gina is keenly aware of the professional risk of such rhetorical activity in this primarily white workplace” (Walls 408). Stausland Johnsen further examines this notion of risk in the use of an “upper Oslo” dialect in Norway. He explains that because there are negative opinions about the particular dialect, those negative opinions are transferred to the speakers of that dialect. He notes, “It is therefore quite risky to use features of the upper Oslo dialect in the local schools or in the workplace” (624). He adds, “...and those who nevertheless use such features are easily laughed down, teased, and bullied” (624). Not only can linguistic discrimination affect a business’s success in consumer-business

relations, but within a company, employees may become ostracized because of the variation of language they speak.

Studies also show that regional language variety can have negative effects on both employability and future earning potential. Beverly deGraw and Charles Patrick explain in “Toward Employability in an Era of Globalization: The Need to Change Regional Communication Traits”:

Accents do not usually have any adverse effect on individuals as long as they stay in the region where the accent was acquired. When a person goes to a different region, accent can become very noticeable. Stereotypical ideas about groups often enter into decisions on hiring and advancement within business and industry. (68)

Outlining a study conducted at Moorehead State University, these researchers found that regional accent use can have negative effects on employability because of the stereotypes those accents invoke. Similarly, in a study of German dialects, Rakic, Steffens, and Mummendey suggest that the use of Saxon, Bavarian, and Berlin dialects “resulted in lower perceived competence and hirability than standard German” (868). Furthermore, focusing specifically on residents of the American South, Jeffrey Grogger’s research of 6,080 respondents determines a connection between dialects (Southern American English (SAE) and African American Vernacular English (AAVE)) and pay scales. He argues in “Speech and Wages” that “racially and regionally distinctive speech patterns are strongly negatively correlated with wages” (948). This distinction, according to Grogger, emerges from language discrimination. He explains, “One explanation is customer and coworker discrimination. An abundance of evidence from social psychology shows that listeners prefer mainstream to nonmainstream speech, which could result in higher wages for

mainstream-spoken workers in highly interactive sectors” (948). For Grogger, social discrimination of Southern whites of a lower socioeconomic status and African Americans is related to their language use, prompting listeners to assign stereotypes of a speaker’s identity based on the dialect they speak. In turn, this dialect use correlates with the wages of the speakers. Contemporary research suggests that there are very real risks to utilizing a regional dialect in business settings—for becoming part of an in-group within a company, for the capital success of the business, and for individual career success.

Combatting Linguistic Discrimination through Code-Meshing and Translanguaging

Because this linguistic discrimination exists, many speakers (all of whom speak in multiple dialects and registers) have learned to code-switch. Wolfram and Schilling-Estes in *American English: Dialects and Variations* examine the inner workings of code-switching (which they class as one type of “style-shifting” although the dividing line between the two terms is blurry) (282-3). Code-switching is defined as “switching between dialects of one language or from one language to another” (Wolfram and Schilling-Estes 283). The necessity to code-switch in the workplace is determined by the “linguistic marketplace,” which Wolfram and Schilling-Estes define as “the extent to which a person’s economic activity necessitates the use of a particular language variety” (163). The writers continue to say that many workplace settings require a more frequent use of mainstream American English. Because of this, those who typically speak in a vernacular code-switch into a more mainstream version of English when they enter the workplace. This model (which, to note, is discussed descriptively and not prescriptively by Wolfram and Schilling-Estes), however, reveals an ideology that privileges one dialect

over another in specific settings and assumes access to and knowledge of the privileged dialect by the speaker in order for them to participate in the discourse community.

Vershawn Ashanti Young has problematized the need to code-switch by developing a new model: code-meshing. In “Code-Meshing or Code-Switching?” Young demonstrates that code-switching is problematic because it perpetuates Smitherman’s model of linguistic push-pull. Quoting from Smitherman’s *Talkin and Testifyin*, Young writes, “She [Smitherman] explains that ‘push-pull’ is ‘pushing toward White American Language and Culture while pulling away from it and toward the embrace of Black Language and Culture’” (Young 58). For Young, code-switching—by causing writers and speakers to conform to Standard American English in certain settings—reinforces Smitherman’s linguistic push-pull instead of reinforcing equality. Code-meshing, on the other hand, is “blending vernacular language and dialects of English in speaking and writing” (Young 76). This blending allows for multiple varieties of English to be acceptable in many settings, including the workplace. For Young, this blending already occurs in everyday communicative events, yet it is not always encouraged or honored (especially in professional or scholastic realms).

Suresh Canagarajah, too, has influenced the way compositionists view language variety in the classroom and in written documents. Through *translingualism*, Canagarajah asserts that speakers of multiple languages (and, too, speakers of a single language and multiple dialects) constantly shuffle between and blend those languages, but Horner and Alvarez argue that this term, too, is problematic and subject to multiple definitions in the field. They write, “Arguments for code-switching/meshing and translanguaging seem likewise concerned with those utterances that in some way deviate from what are

recognized as language norms, specifically utterances that deploy a mix of languages, particularly in ways that deviate even from conventional practices of code-switching (as linguists have traditionally defined that term)” (15). This view of translanguaging still relies on the premise of a change from a “conventional practice” (15). To dismantle the idea that there is a conventional practice that is regularly followed, Horner and Alvarez use the terms *translingual* and *translingual theory* to advance a new definition:

translingual theory refers to shifting perspectives about language use. For Horner and Alvarez, composition studies that emphasize language use (what in the past may have been considered language difference) in writing are translingual, not because there is a standard from which the language is deviating, but because language variation is being considered an accepted practice in a space where, historically, it has been an unaccepted practice. Horner and Alvarez offer a theory of language use that allows for regional varieties to be accepted in the workplace—because it already happens, and there is not a norm from which to deviate.

In relationship to SUSE, we can see this blending of languages on a public scale in advertisements and social media posts, even for sectors traditionally opposed to the use of SUSE. Take for instance this Facebook post for the academic journal, *College English*, published by the National Council of Teachers of English.



Figure 2.1: Screenshot of a Facebook Post from College English from 28 November 2018.

Used as a promotion for the new issue in November 2019, the journal uses the phrase, “Not to brag, but this is some pretty cool stuff, y’all.” Not only does this professional, academic organization use the term *y’all*, which is a marker of SUSE, but the organization also uses *cool*, which originates in African American Vernacular English and West African languages (Sidnell). Perhaps readers of this post noticed the use of *y’all*, because it is recognized as a deviation from the expected, yet glossed over *cool* because the phrase has become so ingrained in conversations that it is no longer novel. In either case, the author of this post draws from different dialects and discourse communities (translingually) to communicate professionally. Adopting the terms *translingual* and *translinguality* as a conceptual basis to demonstrate how writers use SUSE requires a subtle shift in ideology—seeing SUSE not as a deviation from the norm, but as an integral part of each participant’s (and often each organization’s) language.

Moving discussions of translingualism into the domain of genre studies, Anis Bawarshi’s “Beyond the Genre Fixation: A Translingual Perspective” further carves

space for language variation by demonstrating how generic conventions fit within a translingual framework. Bawarshi urges his readers to think of genres as performances, not merely words on a page, and in doing so, to consider how those performances are affected by the rhetorical situation at hand. While generic conventions exist, they are never static and always influenced by the power dynamics of a culture in their performance, including the power structures embedded in the languages we use and speak. To have a translingual perspective on generic composition, Bawarshi argues, means that we consider uptake, which references the “relational force or interplay that operates between genres and that accounts for the interconnections, translations, and movements of actions and meanings across genres” (246). To allow for flexibility and movement in languages requires an understanding of uptake and its interconnectedness with culture. Bawarshi concludes by explaining:

...every genre uptake is taking place within certain asymmetrical relations of power and material, economic, and historical conditions, within and across linguistic as well as spatial and temporal locations, to achieve specific goals (which may not necessarily be the ones conditioned by the genre in use), and subject to memory, emotion, an individual's sense of self, available discursive and linguistic resources, embodied dispositions, histories of engagement, and other agentive factors...Paying attention to uptake allows us to examine translingual performances in this more complex way and to recognize the interlocking systems and forces at play in performances of genre. (247)

For Bawarshi, translingualism and language variety have a place in generic compositions because they have a place in culture. That is, as Horner and Alvarez explain, language

variation, regional dialects, world Englishes, and more are already circulating within the cultures and subcultures (and within the businesses and organizations) in which genres exist. Knowing this connection helps to understand the rhetorical nature of genres and opens the door for readers and writers to become more receptive to language variation within the constraints of generic composition.

Full Circle: Students' Right to their Own [Southern] Language and the Business Writing Classroom

Theories of translingualism, such as those of Canagarajah, Horner, Alvarez, Bawarshi (and more), alongside the code-meshing scholarship of Young and the diligent work of sociolinguists striving to remove stereotypes of language from our culture comprise today's scholarship about language variation. However, simply because these theories encourage an ideology shift does not mean that the general workplace population has accepted this shift and dropped their language biases (as much current research presented here still suggests). Even still, this work must continue.

So, where can we go from here? Is there a place for SUSE in the workplace? Is it a hindrance to success or a tool for crafting meaningful connections? Is it worth encouraging in students and workers? Linguistic freedom from discrimination would—in a perfect world—allow for unbiased acceptance of the language one chooses to use. This, rightly, was the goal of “Students' Right to their Own Language.” Ultimately, as Smitherman notes, changes in language biases can happen in the classroom (Smitherman “CCCC's Role” 371). The forthcoming study builds a framework for this. Through examining the use of SUSE by speakers in the workplace and understanding how they learned to use this language rhetorically, this research reveals a pathway toward linguistic

diversity as a source of rhetorical dexterity in the business writing classroom. The methods explained in the next chapter allow for careful analysis of the perceptions of SUSE in the workplace of a small subset of participants. The purpose of that analysis is to craft a pedagogical framework that encourages not only SUSE use in business interactions at the educational level, but also allows for additional regional, racial, and socioeconomically marked language varieties—like Eustice sought to encourage Scots-English use in Glasgow and like Smitherman sought to bring linguistic equality for African Americans to American society through classroom instruction (Smitherman “CCCC’s Role” 371).

Leading to Methods and Methodology

Each of the sections in this literature review demonstrates a facet of current research that relates to my forthcoming study. To form my methodology, I will rely on the concepts of emails and genres currently circulating in the fields of genre studies and business communication to demonstrate how emails can be studied as conduits for multiple genres, each of which require a consideration of “interdiscursivity” (Bhatia *Critical* 30)¹⁴. My methods speak to linguistic and rhetorical stylistic conversations of language variation, as I seek to understand how professional writers engage SUSE in

¹⁴ Note that I have selected Bhatia’s notion of *interdiscursivity* to guide this dissertation and methodology. Yet, there is still much to be gleaned from incorporating Spinuzzi’s similar terms, *splicing* and *weaving*. While *interdiscursivity* lends a nuanced concept of genres, *splicing* and *weaving* offers a way to understand genres as even less fixed and even more flexible. In further research about this topic beyond this dissertation, it will be worthwhile to consider the email genres at play in terms of *splicing* and *weaving* alongside *interdiscursivity*, but for the constraints of this dissertation study, I will rely primarily on Bhatia’s concept of *interdiscursivity* to explain the phenomena of merging genres.

their communications. And finally, current research points further to pedagogical implications, which will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY, METHODS, AND PARTICIPANTS

From the literature review presented in the previous chapter, it is clear that this project draws from varying fields—genre studies, rhetorical style, sociolinguistics, and business communication. As such, the methods and methodology that inform this study are varied. To understand how writers lean on their regional language variety to communicate in the workplace, in this chapter, I will introduce a hybrid methodology that incorporates the work of Vijay K. Bhatia and Clay Spinuzzi. Bhatia combines discourse analysis and genre analysis to form a methodology of “interdiscursivity” (*Critical* 30). Whereas Bhatia tends to gloss over rhetorical implications for genres and discourse communities, Spinuzzi offers a rhetorically based framework for my methodology. Combining these three fields—genre analysis, discourse analysis, and rhetorical analysis—provides a mixed methodology that offers a robust picture of regional language variety in workplace communication. From this methodology, I will (1) present a method of study for conducting interviews, collecting data, and analyzing artifacts and (2) establish the parameters of a study employing these methods to examine SUSE in email communications in the field of marketing in Coastal South Carolina.

Methodology

Bhatia’s Combination of Genre Analysis and Discourse Analysis

Combining the methodologies of discourse analysis and genre analysis is not necessarily a new practice. Both Barbara Johnstone and Vijay K. Bhatia directly link

discourse analysis and genre studies as compatible methodologies for analyzing professional writing. Johnstone notes that “discourse analysts interested in how writing and other communicative skills are acquired and deployed in a professional discourse community have used the idea of ‘genre’ in discussing the categories of texts which a person has to learn to recognize, reproduce, and manipulate in order to become a competent member of a particular community” (*Discourse* 198). For Johnstone, discourse analysis can be useful in genre studies as researchers learn how discourse happens within typified, recurring texts (198). In 1993, Vijay K. Bhatia called for a mixed methodology in studying business communication through the combination of genre analysis and discourse analysis. He argues that genre analysis not merely complements, but enhances discourse analysis, providing researchers with a “thicker description” by examining “socio-cultural, institutional and organizational” factors (*Analysing* 11).

Discourse analysis, on its own, attends to matters of language, but not language in a vacuum. For Johnstone, discourse analysis focuses on language in use—in systems, in groups, in societies, and in business. Because of this attention to context, the methodology allows for situated analysis of language variety. Citing the Greek sophists, Plato, and Aristotle as the first discourse analysts, Johnstone provides a heuristic for study with six tenants that reveal the contextuality discourse:

Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world; Discourse is shaped by people’s purposes, and discourse shapes possible purposes; Discourse is shaped by linguistic structure, and discourse shapes linguistic structure; Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants; Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future

discourse; Discourse is shaped by its media, and it shapes the possibilities of its media. (*Discourse* 8)

This heuristic allows researchers to consider language variation as it works within a particular discourse community, such as a workplace, and learn how that community shapes the use of dialect and how the use of dialect shapes it. But an analysis of a document simply for language in use would be incomplete, as part of what shapes a text is the genre through which it is composed. Johnstone reveals that in discourse analysis, a discourses are directly linked to generic communication. She writes, “Discourses, in their linguistic aspect, are *conventionalized* sets of choices for discourse, or talk” (*Discourse* 3, emphasis mine). If discourse is composed of conventionalized—or typified—choices and language, there must be genres—typified modes of communications—at play.

While Johnstone indicates that discourses analysts “interested in how writing and other communicative skills are acquired and deployed” lean on genre analysis methodology, Bhatia has provided the most robust picture of genre and discourse analysis as a mixed methodology for studying business communication (*Discourse* 198). Bhatia calls his methodology Critical Genre Analysis (not to be confused with Critical Discourse Analysis, as Bhatia’s methodology is less concerned with social justice as hearty, critical descriptions of discourse within genres in action) (*Critical* 23-27). Bhatia’s Critical Genre Analysis (CGA) provides a framework for analyzing discourse—that is, language in context—as it functions within genres, and his work broadens the scope of the factors under scrutiny in such analyses.

Put simply, CGA studies language use in genres in context, and Bhatia is most interested in applying this methodology in professional settings. For Bhatia, genre

analysis is incomplete without attention to language and discourse, and discourse analysis is incomplete without a consideration of generic conventions. He writes that in order to study genres, “...one needs to have a good understanding of some of the key aspects of the analysis of language use” (*Critical* 3). Mixing methods—in this case, discourse and genre analyses—leads to a “more complete view” of communicative moments in the workplaces (*Critical* 6). Bhatia describes his methodology in this way:

Critical Genre Analysis...recognizes that studying genre is not simply meant to describe and explain language use, but also to account for professional practices in an attempt to investigate why and how professionals create, disseminate and consume specialized knowledge and exploit available semiotic resources and modes of communication to achieve their professional goals. CGA thus intends to extend the scope of conventional genre analytical theory from a focus on textual artefacts to the one based on “professional practices and activities,” thus making a crucial distinction between “discursive practices” and “professional practices” in an attempt to define and propose a more comprehensive framework, opening up “socio-pragmatic” space. (*Critical* 27)

It is Bhatia’s goal to situate genres within organizations to understand how the professional environment shapes the discourse of a genre. Genres function within multiple discourse communities that are shaped by professional practices and activities, as well as by the individual professional goals of the writer.

In order to explain the influence of multiple discourses on and within a given genre, Bhatia relies on the term “interdiscursivity,” which he describes as the interrelationships and overlap of multiple discourse communities on other discourse

communities (*Critical* 30). Similar to intertextuality, where one text draws from another text, interdiscursivity invites analysis of one discourse drawing on another. Bhatia explains that professional writers “constantly [operate] within and across generic boundaries creating new but essentially related and/or hybrid (both mixed and embedded) forms” (*Critical* 36). Interdiscursivity describes this practice and allows for the “bending,” “embedding,” and “mixing” of genres, and it is this process that Bhatia links with “competence” that comes from “professional expertise” (*Critical* 37, *Worlds* 164). Specifically, it is the interdiscursive nature of genres that allows for flexibility, and the ability for a writer to engage with that flexibility is a marker of generic mastery. Bhatia calls this mastery “discursive competence,” which is needed “in order to expertly operate within well-defined professional as well as general socio-cultural contexts” (*Worlds* 165). Professional writers who understand the interdiscursivity of generic communication and apply or perform that interdiscursivity to their writing practice are often the more successful communicators in an organization.

This view of genres is not necessarily unique, and many scholars have already argued that genres work in systems (see Bazerman, Devitt, Berkenkotter, Navarro, and Spinuzzi) and are flexible (see Bawarshi and Reiff, Chan, Miller, and Morton). Yet, what Bhatia proposes in his research methodology is slightly different. Not only do genres rely on other genres, they specifically rely on multiple *discourse communities*, and the language of those discourse communities, for their production. What is key in Bhatia’s methodology is his laser focus on language within the genre.

For Bhatia, the language used—the word choices, the syntax, the pragmatics—within genres is a performance of interdiscursivity, so his methodology accounts for

professional practice (what language is acceptable by the profession, organization, institution, etc.) and professional identities (what language is acceptable for the writer in their shaping of a professional identity) (*Critical* 58-9). In each generic communication, the writer is performing interdiscursive linguistic moves that draw from the writer's membership in multiple discourse communities.

In the field of technical communication, the work of Clay Spinuzzi aligns well with that of Bhatia. As Bhatia describes the interdiscursivity of genres, Spinuzzi similarly describes the interconnected nature of genres as *genre ecologies* and *networked systems*. As defined by Spinuzzi and Zachry:

A *genre ecology* includes an interrelated group of genres (artifact types and the interpretive habits that have developed around them) used to jointly mediate the activities that allow people to accomplish complex objectives. In genre ecologies, multiple genres and constituent subtasks co-exist in a lively interplay as people grapple with information technologies. (Spinuzzi and Zachry 172)

This definition of *genre ecologies* necessitates a stance that genres are inherently connected to organizations, time, humans, mediums, and other genres. Spinuzzi's tracing of an organization's genre ecology allows researchers to see this interconnected complexity of the genre's structure and relationship to other genres. Spinuzzi writes, "...we may benefit greatly by tracing them [genres] across history and across organizational boundaries, understanding the genres' ecological relationships and how they have been altered" (*Tracing* 64). The act of tracing these interconnected ecologies reveals how genres serve the purposes of users and organizations over time.

In *Network: Theorizing Knowledge Work in Telecommunications*, Spinuzzi expands further his concept of genre ecologies, delineating how they function and work within an organization. He argues that genre ecologies are “woven” and “spliced” (*Network* 147). They are woven because over time, genres become “stable configurations that can be conveyed to others,” and they are spliced because they allow for “opportunistic additions, innovations, and comediations” (*Network* 147). This state of being both woven and spliced gives genres the characteristic of “stability-with-flexibility” (*Network* 147). Genre ecologies provide users with a relatively fixed set of conventions that convey meaning to other users in typified ways. Yet, those conventions are not set, and they are bound to be broken, altered, and improved upon. Spinuzzi’s definition of genres (expanded from Carolyn Miller’s) works to include new materialist philosophies and connect conversations of genre into modern rhetorical theory (85). In doing so, Spinuzzi updates the concept of genre to allow for more complex discussions of conventions and adaptations in use.

Both Spinuzzi and Bhatia seem to be working from similar stances, with the goals of expanding understanding of genre to account for organizational systems and complex interconnectivity between genres and contexts. Despite overlapping ideas, though, Bhatia and Spinuzzi do not cite each other in their monographs or bodies of research (perhaps because Bhatia has spent his career in international universities (in India, England, Singapore, Greece, and Hong Kong) or because Bhatia’s research leans more toward the field of linguistics with his focus on language in generic and professional communications) (“Professor”). Whatever the cause for separation between the works of Spinuzzi and Bhatia, the research of the two scholars complement each other. So what

can putting these two scholars in conversation add to the methodology of genre studies, specifically for the analysis of language variety within genres?

Adding Spinuzzi's Rhetorical Orientation to Bhatia's Methodology

While Spinuzzi and Bhatia both seek to complicate genres and remove acontextual understandings of them, Bhatia focuses on the language and discourse use within genres, whereas Spinuzzi moves in a more techno-communicative direction with his research. However, introducing Spinuzzi's rhetorical framework to Bhatia's Critical Genre Analysis can further enhance Bhatia's methodology to account for the rhetorical nature of language within genres and discourses. Bhatia never explicitly demonstrates the importance of rhetoric in Critical Genre Analysis, yet he emphasizes the significance of author, context, listener, and content repeatedly in his works. Bringing Spinuzzi's methodology into contact with Bhatia's CGA lends a rhetorical focus to the method.

In *Tracing Genres Through Organizations*, Spinuzzi directly situates his methodology in rhetoric. He writes that genre tracing "is based solidly in rhetorical theory" and "draws from rhetorical theory" (57, 4). In *Network*, Spinuzzi uses Actor Network Theory to study genres in action, a method he explains provides a "rhetorical view of networks" (16). For Spinuzzi, "rhetorical skills are needed" in a networked environment, and thereby needed in the creation and dissemination of genres, which "hold the network together" (194, 17). If a rhetorical view of genres is paramount in Spinuzzi's discussion of generic ecologies and networks, then it is also significant for the field of rhetoric and composition if that field is to implement Bhatia's CGA.

So what might a rhetorical approach to CGA mean and how might the approach allow me to study language variety within genres? Adding a rhetorical spin to CGA

means that the argumentative purpose of each communication factors in to understanding the interdiscursivity of each generic composition, and it means that a rhetorical consideration of language variety (or rhetorical style) is necessary for describing the events that occur within discourse communities that influence the words of generic communication (as outlined in Chapter 2).

Pedagogy in the Methodology

Further informing my methodology is a concern for pedagogical application. According to Bhatia, genre analysis is “one of the most popular and useful tools to analyse academic and professional genres for ESP [English for Specific Purposes] applications” (*Critical* 6). Bhatia’s CGA provides nuance to studying genres in the business writing classroom. He argues that the “ultimate aim” of teaching professional communication should be to offer “a comprehensive account and understanding of genre as interdiscursive performance” (*Critical* 195). To meet this goal, he demonstrates that pedagogical practice should include instruction in communication theories, sociolinguistics (in which he categorizes genre analysis and critical discourse analysis), and language (English for Specific Purposes (ESP)). Bhatia’s framework, though, is geared towards teaching English for specific purposes to students globally, not necessarily to students enrolled in an American university’s business communication class, who, in large part, consider English to be their first language.

To frame Bhatia’s pedagogical outcomes for American university students, an attention to rhetorical agility should replace Bhatia’s focus on teaching ESP. Students in a professional communication class are rarely learning a new language, as they would in a Spanish or Russian course (and as Bhatia suggests with ESP). Instead, they are learning

how to leverage the language they know in order to be rhetorically effective in business environments. Because this rhetorical education is necessary for business writing students, an attention to pedagogical practice is embedded in the following study to offer an intervention into current business writing curriculums, as outlined in Chapter 6.

Methods and the Study

This study contains three parts: interviews, artifact collection, and interview/artifact coding. Each step is designed to offer a way to study the rhetorical interdiscursivity of professional communicative moments and to lead to an understanding of how these communicative moments can inform pedagogical application in the business writing classroom. What this method does is take regional language variety (often relegated to discourse communities outside of the workplace) and examines how it works interdiscursively with generic business email communications to achieve the writer's rhetorical goals. The methods described below may be followed to analyze generic email communications across a wide array of workplace settings, regional language varieties, and population groups. However, the scope of this particular study is much narrower so as to be addressed within the constraints of a single dissertation project: it considers one type of workplace setting, one type of regional language variety, and one type population group (all with varying levels of sub-differences).

In this study, I focus on the Southern United States English (SUSE) use in business communication emails of women in the field of marketing working in coastal South Carolina. This narrow scope provided me with 12 participants, each of whom offered to share some level of access to their business emails with me (11 participants provided full access; one participant, who works in healthcare, could only share

numerical values of SUSE markers due to HIPPA and privacy concerns). The participants in this study identify as women who are from the South and identify as speakers of SUSE. To qualify as participants, the women must also work in a marketing position based in the coastal regions of South Carolina. Variation among the women participating exists in the size of agencies they represent and in their career stage. For agency size, micro-agencies have 1-5 employees with a small number of clients, mid-size agencies have 5-25 employees with a larger number of clients, in-house agencies include organizations with internal marketing teams with a single promoted business or brand, and multi-level marketing indicates an individual marketing a product as part of a larger company. The participants cross a wide range of ages and experiences. For instance, Sloane¹⁵ is mid-career and works at a marketing agency whose primary ethos plays on aspects of the American South. On the other hand, Allison is in her early career and works remotely from Charleston, South Carolina for an international company based in the Dominican Republic. Each woman also holds a different role in the sphere of marketing—from agency principals and graphic designers to PR experts and account executives. Finally, the women also work with varying types of clients, including national brands (like Southern Soda Co.), local franchises (like South Carolina Gear), and small businesses. While the location and professional field of the participants is limited, the variation within this narrow scope is vast. A full and detailed description of each participant is available at the end of this chapter in the “Participants” section. Table 3.1 below demonstrates Variety among participants, indicating that, although this study

¹⁵ All participants have chosen a pseudonym for use in this study. Companies and clients have also been assigned pseudonyms by the researcher.

maintains a narrow focus on women in marketing from coastal South Carolina, the differences in experience, agency type, and position will offer a range of perspectives about using SUSE in the workplace.

Table 3.1: Participant Overview and Career Data

Name	Experience	Agency Type	Position/Title
Margarita	3 Years	Multi-Level Marketing	Market Partner
Ashley	29 Years	Mid-Size Firm	Agency Principal
Polly	18 Years	Internal Marketing	Physician Liaison
Sloane	9 Years	Micro-Firm	Social Media Community Manager
Olivia	9 Years	Internal Marketing	Partner Brand Success Manager
Shelby	15 Years	Micro-Firm	Owner
Truvy	16 Years	Internal Marketing	Office Manager
Allison	2 Years	Internal Marketing	Lead Graphic Designer
Courtney	19 Years	Internal Marketing	Physician Liaison
Maria	16 Years	Mid-Size Firm	Account & Project Manager
Eliza	10 Years	Mid-Size Firm	Public Relations Director
Anne	5 Years	Mid-Size & Micro Firm	Editor & Senior Marketing Strategist

Step 1: Interviews

I invited marketing professionals to work on this project with me by networking and word of mouth, speaking with each participant one-on-one about my project before presenting them with an IRB-approved participant letter. Once participants agreed to work with me, I set up times for in-person or Zoom interviews to not only discuss SUSE use with participants, but to search their emails for key markers of SUSE and obtain contextual information about each email exchange. Although digital interviews were not ideal, many of these encounters occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic, limiting the safety of meeting in person. Zoom proved to be a useful platform for conducting these

interviews because of its screen-sharing technology. Whether face-to-face or digital, each interview lasted approximately two hours, and I recorded the audio using an iPhone or Zoom's technology.

The goal of the interview was to learn about the interdiscursive nature of SUSE use for each participant and about how they learned to lean on multiple discourse communities (both of their regional dialect and of their profession). For this reason, the interview questions focus on participants' individual context of SUSE (in what discourse communities they find it to be appropriate) and pedagogy (how they learned what was appropriate or not). I first asked participants about their demographic information and their company's profile, including: age, racial identity, sexual orientation, number of years in marketing, education, company, title or position, type of company (micro-agency, mid-size agency, in-house, etc.), hometown in the South, current residence, and current place of business. Then, more in-depth interviews began with the following set of questions:

1. What words or phrases do you write or say that you think are connected with SUSE?
2. Would you use those phrases/words in your business communications?
3. When do you find it appropriate to use SUSE? When do you find it to be inappropriate?
4. If there are situations in which it is inappropriate, how do you learn which situations those were?
5. Are there specific people that you know in business that you would or wouldn't use SUSE when communicating?

6. What is the sense you get from others when they use SUSE?
7. Were you ever taught *not* to use SUSE? If so, how were you taught this?
8. If you went to school for business or marketing, do you remember learning about how language variety can enhance or hinder your success in the field?
9. Do you find the language variety you use to be helpful in building workplace relationships?

It is important to note that these interviews were not limited to these questions. Following Selfe and Howisher's concept of conversational interviews in "Exceeding the Bounds of the Interview: Feminism, Mediation, Narrative, and Conversations about Digital Literacy," the list above served as conversation starters and directions. Selfe and Howisher explain, "...we had grown increasingly dissatisfied with containing our questions to a standard set of prompts that elicited information but did not always encourage follow up questions...we continued to modify our exchanges to more closely follow the format of semi-structured (Ritchie and Lewis) or unstructured interviews" (39). The interviews conducted for this study were semi-structured. All participants were asked the queries listed above, yet those questions prompted more follow-up questions, which I pursued in each interview, giving them a conversational tone and structure. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked participants to open their laptop or desktop computer so that we could search together their business emails and collect artifacts that demonstrate the use of SUSE.

Step 2: Artifact Collection

The second step in this method is artifact collection. Because I was interested in how professionals use SUSE in email communications, having access to an archive of

emails in which writers engage in some form of SUSE use was imperative for this study. I first developed a search list of *markers* of SUSE based on previous research in the field and on my own experience using the language. I also pulled the answers from each interviewee's response to Question 1 above, in order to include their contributions in the search list.

It is important to recognize that not all Southerners use the same set of markers of SUSE, and many of these markers are region, race, income, and age specific. Montgomery and Johnson reveal, "...historically no section of the country has been more linguistically diverse as the American South" because of its multiplicitous iterations of SUSE, which include Southern African American English, Appalachian English, Gullah, Charleston English, New Orleans English, and more (xvii). SUSE is flexible and is a descriptor used to encompass a wide variety of subdialects within the region and beyond. Too, with the ease of movement around the country and similarities between SUSE and other language varieties of rural regions across the nation, the features of SUSE are not fully bound by geography. Barbara Johnstone notes, "Sounding like a Southerner is not, in other words, an automatic and inevitable result of being from the South" ("Features" 189). Montgomery and Johnson add that most features of Southern speech can be found elsewhere in the US. Despite this inability to draw firm boundary lines around the language variety, they write:

Although no one common linguistic denominator distinguishes the South, linguists still identify it as a speech region, on the basis of three main characteristics: (1) a unique combination of linguistic features, (2) the use of these feature more often and by a wider range of the population than elsewhere in the

country, and (3) the consciousness of the people in the South that they form a region with distinctive speechways. (3)

Viewing SUSE by these three characteristics allows researchers to study and discuss the features of the regional language. So, when I list the terminology of SUSE, it serves specifically as an umbrella term for variations within the dialect. Katherine Wyly Mille refers to this dialect that is common throughout the South as a “broadly Southern dialect of American English” (53). To be clear, when I reference SUSE, I am using a broad term that encompasses the differences among sub-dialects of speakers in the American South.

In order to gather the needed email artifacts, I created a list of search terms indicative of SUSE, starting with current research in the field of linguistics, specifically in reference to lexical and syntactic markers of SUSE. The language variety, of course, includes phonological features, but they are difficult to search in an email. For instance, “g-dropping” would not necessarily appear in a search because modern email systems offer Auto-Correct features that change “-in” to “-ing.” Additionally, one could not necessarily search for “I” pronounced as “aye,” as the spelling of the term in print would likely not have changed. Montgomery and Johnson offer a sweeping overview of the grammatical and lexical features of the South, broadly speaking, from which I began my list. The following table (3.2) chronicles their descriptions in visual form.

Table 3.2: Southern Features as Described by Montgomery and Johnson

Feature	Category	Example	Notes
<i>Y'all</i> and <i>You All</i>	Grammatical	Where are y'all going this weekend?	Second-Person Plural Pronouns
Pronoun + <i>all</i>	Grammatical	What all did you do last weekend?	Indicative of Inclusion

Multimodal (<i>might could, may can, might should</i>)	Grammatical	We might could go to the concert next weekend.	
Perfective <i>done</i>	Grammatical	I done saw the Dixie Chicks in concert.	Used for emphasis.
<i>Liked</i> + infinitive	Grammatical	I liked to cried when they sang “Wide Open Spaces.”	Used to mean “almost”
Personal Dative Pronoun	Grammatical	I bought me a tee-shirt to remember the night.	
<i>Fixin’</i> to	Grammatical	I’m fixin’ to join the official Dixie Chicks fan club.	To mean “be about to, getting prepared to”
<i>Cracker</i>	Lexical	Crackers love Dixie Chicks.	Meaning: ‘A white person from rural Georgia for Florida’
<i>Gumption</i>	Lexical	They don’t have the gumption to realize the Dixie Chicks aren’t that great.	Meaning: “common sense, good judgement, shrewdness.”
<i>Little piece</i>	Lexical	They’ll walk more than a little piece to see them perform if they have to.	Meaning: “short distance”
<i>Skillet</i>	Lexical	If I have to listen to “Travelin’ Soldier” one more time, I’ll break the stereo with the skillet.	Meaning: “frying pan”
<i>Quarter till</i>	Lexical	The neighbors will complain if we play “Goodbye Earl” at quarter till midnight.	Meaning: “quarter to”

<i>Blinds</i>	Lexical	If only the blinds could drown out the sound of “Long Time Gone” <i>and</i> the light.	Meaning: “window covering”
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Barbara Johnstone offers an additional depiction of SUSE in her chapter “Features and Uses of Southern Style” from *English in the Southern United States*. Particularly, she notes that *sir* and *ma’am* are “required elements of the answer to a *yes/no* question” as a form of politeness, an expression of solidarity with peers, and (depending upon intonation) an expression of sarcasm (192). She also indicates that the word *reckon* appears in SUSE frequently because of the desire for Southerners to hedge statements and allow their opinions to be received by audiences more gently (194). Finally, Catherine Evans Davies offers even more terminology associated with the south in her chapter “Southern American English in Alabama” from *Speaking of Alabama* adds that SUSE often features “creative” uses of negation (60). For example, a speaker of SUSE may use double or triple negation in their grammatical sentence constructions. The elements provided here by Montgomery and Johnson, Johnstone, and Davies offer a broad picture of SUSE markers.

It is also worthwhile to offer a picture of the lexical and phonological features of SUSE common in coastal South Carolina, as this specific location is key in my forthcoming study. As mentioned above, all participants in work and live in the coastal regions of South Carolina, primarily the Lowcountry and the Grand Strand. These regions feature similar linguistic characteristics as they are geographically close to each other and share similar histories of immigration and economic growth. Because SUSE is a broad term, I wanted to also offer some specific terminology of the region in which all

participants work. The language of the area not only incorporates those terms, phrases, and constructions common among the majority of Southern regions, but also includes influences from Gullah culture and Charleston's status as an historical port city.

Katherine Wyly Mille offers a list of terms and phrases common in coastal South Carolina influenced by Geechee, the language of the Gullah people spoken primarily on the barrier islands off the coast of South Carolina from Georgetown to Beaufort. These lexical terms and features include: *broadus*, *piazza*, *buckra*, *cooter*, *Da*, *pinder*, *ninna*, *joggling board*, and *benne seeds* (Mille 53). Of these, *piazza* (porch), *joggling board*, and *benne seeds*, are the only terms in use still by modern speakers (although it's not uncommon for older generations to use more of these terms) (Mille 53). Other common phrases associated with coastal South Carolina's version of SUSE include: "I ran up with him," "I ran across him," "them boys," "used to didn't," "fell out the bed," and "wait on me" (Mille 53). It is important to note that participants in the forthcoming study, although they may all work in coastal South Carolina, come from various locations in the South with their own linguistic idiosyncrasies.

In addition to these markers identified through current scholarship in SUSE, I used my own intuition and experience in the South to supplement the search list below. Cheryl Geisler and Jason Swarts explain in "Coding Streams of Language: Techniques for the Systematic Coding of Text, Talk, and Other Verbal Data" that this leaning on intuition is necessary in coding language. They write, "Keep in mind that due to the complexity of language, coders will always need to draw on their intuitions about what language does and means. No amount of effort in constructing a coding scheme will eliminate the need for a coder to use interpretive judgement in coding...the best coding

schemes work with, massage, and otherwise direct a coder's intuitions into ways of interpretation intended by the researcher" (Geisler and Swarts 117). The list of search terms—able to be input into modern email programs (Outlook and Gmail)—that reflects these markers revealed through linguistic research and the features known to me through experience with SUSE is as follows in Table 3.3:

Table 3.3: Southern Feature Email Search Terms

Y'all	You All	Them All	May Could, Might Could, May Should, Might Should, May Can, Might Can	Liked to
Fixin' to/ Fixing to/ Fixin to	Get Me, Got Me, Have Me, Had Me, Buy Me, Bought Me	Gumption	A Piece (in reference to distance)	Done (in Prefective Form)
'Till / till / til	Ma'am / mam	Sir	Reckon	No (in Double Negation)
None (in Double Negation)	Not (in Double Negation)	Ran Across	Used to Didn't / Used to Could	Fell Out
Wait On / Waiting On	Ain't	Yonder	Bless	Directly (for Soon)
A lick of	Hold your horses	Hill of beans	Pusselgut	Heavens to Betsy
Caddywompus	Sweet time	dohickey / thingamabob	piazza	hush up
Goodness	circy/sircy/sirsy	I figure / I gather	ornery	rile/riled
blinds	skillet	benne	joggling board	

With this list, I asked participants to search their professional emails for each of these terms from the date of the interview back through January 1, 2018¹⁶. When results would appear, the participant opened each email individually. To follow Bhatia and Spinuzzi's methodology, I asked participants to discuss the content and context of the message with me so that I could ascertain (1) the genre of the message, (2) the rhetorical situation of each email, and (3) how it interacted with other discourse communities of the company and of the writer. I, in essence, asked participants to narrate the context of the given email exchange. Additionally, I made a note of the total number of emails containing the marker so that it could be compared to the total number of emails sent between January 1, 2018 and the date of the interview. If a message contained a marker of SUSE, and the participant was willing, she forwarded the message to my email account for further study. By the end of this process, I had 566 email artifacts from 11 writers, plus quantitative, numerical data only about the appearance of SUSE markers from one writer.

Step 3: Interview and Artifact Coding

To analyze the interviews and artifacts collected, I began a process of detailed coding. Geisler and Swarts provide a flexible view of coding language in qualitative research that informed my process. They demonstrate that the purpose of coding language in qualitative analysis is to “create” and “assign” a word or phrase to

¹⁶ I chose January 1, 2018 for two reasons. First, it is reasonable that participants could clearly remember the contextual details of an email within the last two-and-a-half to three years. Second, many participants' email accounts contained thousands of emails dating back up to ten years. This search parameter offers timely and relevant results that reflect the participant's current position within the company and career stage, while still providing a large dataset for analysis.

“symbolize, summarize, or otherwise capture” an “attribute” of language in analyzable form (Geisler and Swartz 113). However, the authors acknowledge that this process is discursive and evolves as the coding progresses: “Developing a coding scheme involves an interactive process of moving back and forth between the developing scheme and a sample of the data to be coded” (Geisler and Swartz 119). This back-and-forth movement allows for new data to gain a place in the coding scheme as the research progresses. Put directly, as this coding phase may look like an organized, segmented “Step 3,” the process was actually much messier in that the code described next did not develop all at once, but by a process of reading, learning, and adapting that code to account for new iterations of SUSE in the artifacts.

For the interviews, I first transcribed the conversation, writing out each participant’s answer to each interview question. The specific purpose of the interviews was to provide insight into the rhetorical moment and motivations behind specific email exchanges and a broad picture of the participants’ perceptions of SUSE in the workplace. Because of this, I viewed the transcriptions alongside each email artifact so that I could code according to the writer’s description of the exchange, especially in reference to audience, relationship, and context. The only element of the preliminary interview portion that I coded was an overall sense of the author’s perception of the use of SUSE, described in detail below. I coded the email artifacts for: writer, company, SUSE marker used, audience (client, co-worker, colleague, boss, friend, etc.), perception of relationship with that audience at the time of writing the email (friendly, neutral, confrontational, hostile, etc.), interdiscursivity (qualitative response of context), and genre (request, apology, informative, etc.).

For SUSE markers, I broke these into two categories: those words one likely *only* hears in the Southern United States and those connected with SUSE (*distinctly Southern*), but often heard outside of the Southern United States (*mainstream Southern*)¹⁷. For instance, *y'all* is typically only spoken in the South, whereas *you all*—still a Southern iteration of the second-person plural—may sometimes be heard across the United States. I categorized the audience by *client* (one paying for the services of the writer), *co-worker* *high/equal/low* (one who works in the same company as the writer of higher, equal, or lower rank in the business), *colleague* (a work contact employed by another company), *boss* (one to whom the writer reports), *community member* (a contact in the community that does not work at another company with which the writer conducts business), *vendor* (a contact with whom the writer obtains a good or service), *personal* (a contact that is neither friend or family, but associated with personal business and is contacted through an office email system), *friend/family* (a friend or family member not associated with the writer's career but contacted through an office email system), and *mass email* (an email sent to more than five recipients). I further classified the emails by the tone the writer took when composing the email, whether that be *friendly*, *neutral*, *confrontational*, or *hostile*; these details of the relationship were revealed in the participant interviews as we searched for email artifacts as well as in the texts themselves. For instance, if a text included multiple exclamation points and smiling emojis, I categorized it as *friendly*. As for genres, the *request* included any email in which the writer was eliciting specific information or action from her audience. The *response to a request* genre included any

¹⁷ These distinctions were drawn with the assistance of my participants, who (in their interviews) indicated which terms they would likely use outside of the South vs. those they would likely only use within the Southern United States.

email in which the writer was providing information prompted by the email recipient. The *apology* genre included any email in which the writer had made a mistake (whether an “I’m sorry” was included in the text or not). The *informative* email includes primarily stated information that does not require an action from the recipient. *Thank you* emails and *approval* emails express thankfulness (whether they use the phrase “thank you” or not) and approval (respectively) for an action of the recipient. Finally, *chatter* emails contain wholly phatic conversation. Unsurprisingly, many emails contained multiple genres, but the document was coded for the primary purpose of communication. For instance, one email from participant Anne says:

Hola!

[Client Name] from [Company Name] called to ask that we only send invoices/bills/statements/etc to one email for them, which is [email address]. She said there was another email address on the emails she’s been getting—[email address] (i believe that’s spelled right), that needs to be removed.

Thank you ma’am!!!

This email contains phatic conversation (“Hola!”), a request, and thanks. However, its primary purpose is to relay a request, so I coded it in the genre of *request*.

Because SUSE is often reserved for those discourse communities and genres outside of the workplace, the insertion of a marker of SUSE in these genres could be considered a move away from conventions, demonstrating a writer’s “flexibility” (Bhatia *Critical* 9). The participants’ interview responses about the interdiscursivity of each exchange offers insight about (1) *why* the writer chose to draw from another discourse community in the composition of a professional email and (2) *how* the role of language

functions in that communicative moment (Bhatia *Critical* 11, 36). These responses were not necessarily coded, but included in full as contextual information about the email exchange. This qualitative data, instead, serves to support the findings observed from the codable data.

Perhaps the most difficult segment to code was participants' overall dispositions to SUSE in the workplace because it required leaning on my own intuition to determine whether participants had a positive, negative, or neutral relationship with SUSE at work (Geisler and Swartz 117). To determine this, I relied on the data from interviews, noting when participants expressed embarrassment or pride at their use of SUSE. Additionally, interview data offered a sense of the participant's comfort with the language variety. For this section, in particular, I employed a second coder to review the data and compare his evaluation of overall perception with mine.

Additionally, this second coder spot-checked the accuracy of the code, viewing one set of participant artifacts along with the coded data to ensure that each artifact was categorized correctly. This second coder has allowed me to achieve reliability in my set code. Geisler and Swartz recommend that researchers strive for "intercoder agreement" (155). In this study, with a second coder, the intercoder agreement is fairly high. This level of reliability is possible because, by and large, study participants assisted in the coding of many aspects, such as audience and tone. What the intercoder helped most with was the participants' reactions to and perceptions of SUSE in the workplace, as there is an intuitive element to this coding category.

From these three steps, I have made connections and drawn some conclusions that provide insight into the regional language use of women in professional settings,

specifically in the field of marketing. What this method and coding process offer is insight into *when*, *why*, and *how* writers use SUSE in their business communications.

Participants

Key to understanding the next two chapters of quantitative and qualitative results are the demographics, backgrounds, and workplaces of each participant. Because this study relies on the interdiscursive nature of email communications, the context for each participant is significant in understanding their own discourse communities in which they operate as professionals. This section offers a detailed biography of each participant that will be useful to reference as you review the results of this study, beginning with the following tables (3.4-3.7), each of which provides an overall picture of the participants' demographic, educational, and workplace information. Please note that participants' names and company names have been changed to protect anonymity.

Table 3.4: Participant Demographic Information

Name	Years of Experience	Hometown	Ethnicity	Sexual Orientation	First Language
Allison	3	McDonough, GA	White	Heterosexual	English
Anne	5	Simpsonville, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Ashley	29	Louisville, KY	White	Heterosexual	English
Courtney	19	Lemon Springs, NC	White	Heterosexual	English
Eliza	9	Florence, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Margarita	3	Summerville, SC	Chicana	Heterosexual	Spanish
Maria	16	North Charleston, SC	African American	Heterosexual	English
Olivia	9	Florence, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Polly	18	Murrells Inlet, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Shelby	15	Charleston, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Sloane	9	North Augusta, SC	White	Heterosexual	English
Truvy	16	Hanahan, SC	White	Heterosexual	English

Table 3.5: Participant Workplace Information

Name	Title	Workplace	Workplace Type	Location
Allison	Lead Graphic Designer	Fuego Dominica	Internal Marketing	Charleston, SC
Anne	Editor	Lowcountry Abode Magazine	Mid-Size Firm	Charleston, SC
	Senior Marketing Strategist	Marshside Marketing	Micro-Firm	Charleston, SC
Ashley	Agency Principal	Velocity Marketing	Mid-Size Firm	Charleston, SC
Courtney	Physician Liaison	Cloud 9 Healthcare	Internal Marketing	Conway, SC
Eliza	Public Relations Director	Velocity Marketing	Mid-Size Firm	Charleston, SC
Margarita	Market Partner	Picasa	Multi-Level Marketing	Charleston, SC
Maria	Account & Project Manager	Velocity Marketing	Mid-Size Firm	Charleston, SC
Olivia	Partner Brand Success Manager	Send It	Internal Marketing	Charleston, SC
Polly	Physician Liaison	First Care	Internal Marketing	Myrtle Beach, SC
Shelby	Owner	Oak Hope Consulting	Micro-Firm	Goose Creek, SC
Sloane	Social Media Community Manager	Keane Lee Marketing	Micro-Firm	Charleston, SC
Truvy	Office Manager	Factory Heating + Air	Internal Marketing	Hanahan, SC

Table 3.6: Participant Educational Information

Name	Highest Education	Field of Study
Allison	Bachelor's Degree	Graphic Design
Anne	Bachelor's Degree	Classics
Ashley	Bachelor's Degree	Psychology
Courtney	Bachelor's Degree	Education

Eliza	Bachelor's Degree	Communications
Margarita	Master's Degree	Education
Maria	Master's Degree	Marketing
Olivia	Master's Degree	Marketing
Polly	Highschool Diploma	-
Shelby	Highschool Diploma	-
Sloane	Bachelor's Degree	Communications
Truvy	Highschool Diploma	-

Table 3.7: Participant Perceptions of SUSE

Name	Perception Toward SUSE
Allison	neutral
Anne	negative
Ashley	neutral
Courtney	positive
Eliza	positive
Margarita	neutral
Maria	positive
Olivia	neutral
Polly	negative
Shelby	negative
Sloane	neutral
Truvy	positive

The following three maps are also helpful in orienting the location of each participants' business and home, demonstrating the proximity of the participants as they live and work in the coastal regions of South Carolina.

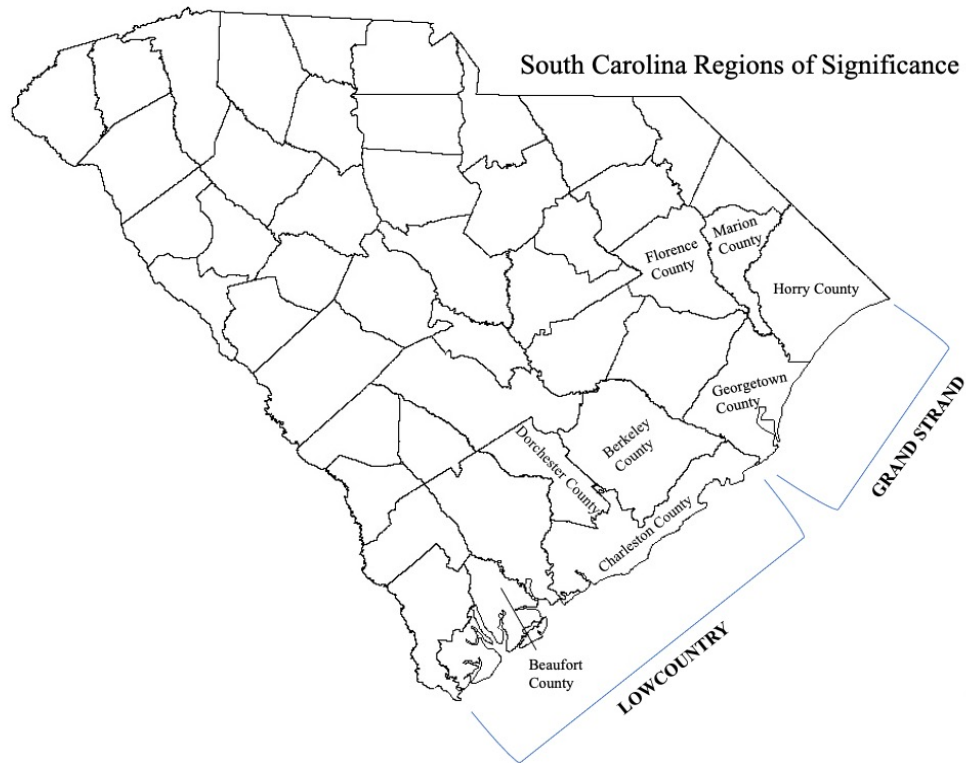


Figure 3.1: Map of South Carolina. This map of South Carolina shows the various counties mentioned in the descriptions below, including Horry, Marion, Florence, Georgetown, Charleston, Berkeley, Dorchester, and Beaufort. The segment of the coast from the southernmost point of South Carolina to midway through Georgetown County is the Lowcountry. Midway through Georgetown County up through Brunswick County (in North Carolina, not shown) is the Grand Strand. Charleston, Berkeley, and Dorchester Counties make up the Tri-County Area (“Blank County Map of South Carolina”).

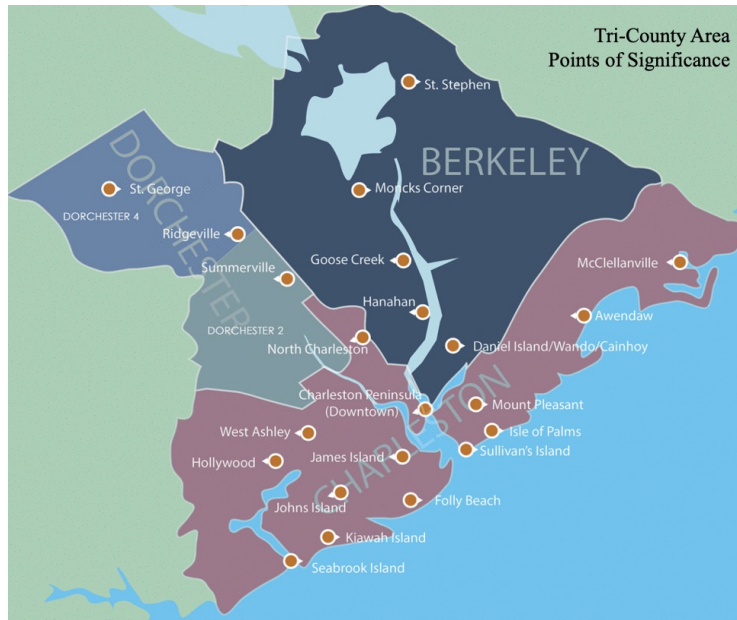


Figure 3.2: Map of Tri-County Area. This map of the Tri-County Area shows key towns and cities mentioned in the descriptions below, all of which are considered to be part of the Lowcountry (Charleston Community Guide).



Figure 3.3: Map of Grand Strand. This map of the Grand Strand shows key towns and cities mentioned in the descriptions below, all of which are considered to be part of the Grand Strand. Note that it also includes Brunswick County, which is located in North Carolina, and no participants from this study work or reside outside of South Carolina (Grand Strand New Home Guide).

Within these broader contexts, each participant has a specific background and workplace context that influences her language use. The next section offers a detailed biography of each participant, providing full context to the overview-style information in the charts above. Please feel free to reference the maps and charts in this section as you read through each participant’s biographical information.

Allison

Allison is a Lead Graphic Designer living and working in Charleston, South Carolina for a candle manufacturing company—Fuego Dominica—with a primary distribution audience in the United States and a headquarters in the Dominican Republic. She was born in Florida, but spent the majority of her childhood in McDonough, Georgia, the place she identifies as *home*. She notes, “[Georgia] is just kind of where I became me, and that's more of the times I remember and all that kind of stuff. So I tend to say ‘Georgia’ [when people ask where I’m from] except for the very few people that actually say, ‘Where were you born?’” After high school graduation, she attended college in Alabama, then transferred to the University of South Carolina, where she earned her bachelor’s degree in Graphic Design. She has been working as a graphic designer for three years (since graduation) and has been at her current company for less than one year¹⁸; she still considers herself to be an early-career professional in her field. As a graphic designer, Allison participates in the marketing efforts of Fuego Dominica by designing labels for the products shipped to the United States made to market the candles

¹⁸ Because Allison has held her current position for less than one year, her email data spans October 1, 2019 (her start date at Fuego Dominica) and August 13, 2020 (our interview date).

successfully to American customers, along with designing the marketing materials that the company uses to advertise their products digitally and in print.

Fuego Dominica operates primarily from the Dominican Republic where the factory is located and employs over 2,000 workers, but they have a small marketing team of four located in South Carolina. Allison is a part of this United States-based team; she has one junior graphic designer working under her, and several marketing professionals who occupy a higher level on the corporate ladder. The company regularly conducts business with label and canister makers located in China and distributors across the United States in key markets in New York, Ohio, and California. In fact, of the emails collected from Allison with markers of SUSE, 16% were written to audiences in non-Southern states and 52% were written to international audiences.

Anne

Anne has held two marketing positions in Charleston, South Carolina in the past five years. From 2015 to mid-2019, she worked as an editor for a local home-product-and-service marketing magazine, *Lowcountry Abode*, and from mid-2019 to present (2020) she works as a Senior Marketing Strategist for Marshside Marketing¹⁹. She has been in the field of marketing since beginning her position at *Lowcountry Abode*, providing her with five years of experience; she considers herself to be somewhat experienced, between an early-career and mid-career professional. Anne grew up in Simpsonville, South Carolina, and after high school, she attended the College of

¹⁹ Because Anne still maintains access to her email account associated with *Lowcountry Abode*, email data comes from both her past and current positions. Email data for this position is available from January 1, 2018 to July 31, 2019. Anne left this position in July 2019 and began working at Marshside Marketing, so email data from this position is available from August 5, 2019 to March 12, 2020 (the date of our interview).

Charleston, receiving her artium baccalaureus degree in the classics. She has lived and worked in the Charleston area ever since.

Lowcountry Abode magazine is an advertorial, marketing magazine housed within a company that also offers trade shows, mailers, promotional email blasts, and a radio show. The business is set up in such a way as to offer a robust marketing package to advertising clients. In Anne's role as Editor, her responsibilities stretched beyond writing and editing copy for the quarterly publication; she was responsible for social media content, press release composition and distribution, and conducting promotional video interviews with clients. Primarily, the day-to-day business of this organization was conducted locally within the Tri-County area (Dorchester, Berkeley, and Charleston counties) only rarely stretching to Beaufort County. The office has 11 full-time employees and a rotating set of interns, placing it in the category of a mid-sized marketing firm. In this position, Anne had no employees working directly under her, yet there was a hierarchy in the office with several employees holding lower paying, lower ranking positions (such as the office manager, a social media manager, and interns). Anne reported directly to the owner of the company.

At Marshside Marketing, Anne is the sole employee working under the owner of the company in a small office in the heart of downtown Charleston. Marshside Marketing is a micro-agency that primarily focuses on digital marketing efforts for a host of clients, all located in the Southern United States. The company, and by extension Anne, offers website design, e-commerce sites, SEO optimization, Google advertising, and paid-social media promotion. Anne works with a variety of vendors and clients, but none of them reside outside the Southern United States.

Ashley

Ashley is an experienced, late-career professional and expert in marketing, who in 2005 began her own agency, Velocity Marketing, based in Charleston, South Carolina. She was born in Arkansas and spent her childhood in Louisville, Kentucky. She attended Purdue University in Indiana, earning her bachelor's degree in psychology. She has spent 29 years in the marketing industry, working first in Chicago before moving to Savannah, GA to begin her own firm. She currently lives in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina and serves as the Agency Principal of Velocity Marketing. She has had an award-winning career and is an active member of the community. She has robust experience in all facets of marketing, from event planning and print ads to public relations and digital strategies.

Velocity Marketing is a mid-sized marketing firm with approximately fifteen employees²⁰ that serves a national client base in six markets outside of the Southern states: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, TX; St. Louis, Missouri; Palm Spring, CA; and Rancho Mirage, CA. These markets are accompanied by 18 markets served within the Southern states. The scope of clients is vast, including retail clients (such as South Carolina Gear²¹ with store locations in five Southern states and GiGi's Boutique in Mount Pleasant, SC), automotive clients (from luxury Porsche and Rolls-Royce dealerships to quality domestic dealerships for Chevrolet and GMC), and healthcare providers (laser eye care and cosmetic procedures). Communications range

²⁰ With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Velocity Marketing has scaled back to five employees, implementing layoffs in mid-2020 as marketing efforts began to slow and clients began to cut their marketing budgets. For the purposes of this project, I have continued to categorize Velocity Marketing as a mid-sized agency (instead of a micro-agency), as the majority of email communications occurred while the agency still had approximately 15 full-time employees.

²¹ Client names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

from internal messages and conversations with local and national clients to emails sent to contacts from automotive manufacturers in Europe.

Courtney

Courtney is a physician liaison at Cloud 9 Healthcare hospital system with 19 years of experience in marketing and sales. She has worked at Cloud 9 for five years, and her primary responsibilities are to act as a marketing representative between the hospital system and doctors' offices around the state, encouraging those offices and physicians to send patients to Cloud 9 when they are ill. She, additionally, often works directly with patients to coordinate their transition between doctor's offices and the main Cloud 9 hospital. Courtney grew up in Lemon Springs, North Carolina, which she describes as a "very rural" town "with the cutest name ever." For college, she attended a small Baptist college in North Carolina, where she earned a degree in education (and taught home economics for many years). She moved to Pawleys Island, South Carolina in 1995 and now resides in Murrells Inlet, just ten miles north of Pawleys Island.

Cloud 9 Healthcare is a regional hospital system in South Carolina that serves the Grand Strand (Horry and Georgetown Counties) along with the PeeDee region (Florence and Marion Counties). The main hospital is located in Conway, South Carolina.

Courtney, as a physician liaison, is responsible for the hospital system's relationships with doctors in the Grand Strand and marketing efforts in this region. Because of the localized nature of the hospital system and Courtney's work, all of her email communications (100%) were sent to audiences residing within the Southern United States.

Courtney's position in the healthcare field, specifically because she often works directly with patients, has limited the scope of viewing her emails²². While she was more than willing to share her experiences with SUSE and workplace communication in the interview, I was only permitted to use numerical data about her use of the SUSE markers and unable to discuss the content and context of the messages, as Courtney expressed concern about violating HIPPA laws.

Eliza

Eliza is the Public Relations Director at Velocity Marketing, the same agency at which Ashley is the Agency Principal. Eliza was born and raised in Darlington, South Carolina. She attended Francis Marion University for the first three years of college, transferred to College of Charleston to complete her senior year, and earned her bachelor's degree in communications with an emphasis in media relations. Since graduating in 2011, she has worked in public relations in Charleston, South Carolina. With nearly a decade of experience, Eliza considers herself to be a mid-to-late career professional. She explains, "I don't want to say I'm late career, because I feel like that might be an insult to other people that have been doing it for 25 years, but I wonder at what point you do get to say, 'I'm an expert in this.' I mean some people will refer to you as like, 'Oh, she's an expert at this,' but really we're all still kind of learning as we go, you know?" This continual learning in the field of PR has allowed Eliza to hone her practices over the past ten years, as she maintains her day-to-day responsibilities of working with media; coordinating stories, photo shoots, and news segments; sharing the

²² In addition to this limitation, the Cloud 9 Healthcare system, for privacy reasons, archives all user emails at the end of each year. The dissertation data collected spans January 1, 2020 to September 8, 2020 (the date of our interview).

news of clients; and developing opportunities for clients to take active roles in their communities.

Velocity Marketing is a mid-sized marketing firm with approximately fifteen employees²³ that serves a national client base in six markets outside of the Southern states: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, TX; St. Louis, Missouri; Palm Spring, CA; and Rancho Mirage, CA. These markets are accompanied by 18 markets served in the Southern states. The scope of clients is vast, including retail clients (such as South Carolina Gear²⁴ with store locations in five Southern states and GiGi's Luxury Boutique in Charleston, SC), automotive clients (from luxury Porsche and Rolls-Royce dealerships to quality domestic dealerships for Chevrolet and GMC), and healthcare providers (laser eye care and cosmetic procedures). Communications range from internal messages and conversations with local and national clients to emails sent to contacts from automotive manufacturers in Europe. Eliza has a nonlinear history with Velocity Marketing. She first worked with the company for six years, then left to pursue another job opportunity. She returned to Velocity in early 2019²⁵.

²³ With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Velocity Marketing has scaled back to five employees, implementing layoffs in mid-2020 as marketing efforts began to slow and clients began to cut their marketing budgets. For the purposes of this project, I have continued to categorize Velocity Marketing as a mid-sized agency (instead of a micro-agency), as the majority of email communications occurred while the agency still had approximately 15 full-time employees.

²⁴ Client names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

²⁵ Because of this gap, previous emails from Eliza's first period of employment at Velocity were no longer available. The email data available for Eliza spans from March 1, 2019 (her return to Velocity) to September 4, 2020 (the date of our interview).

Margarita

Margarita is a Market Partner with a multi-level marketing (MLM) company, Picassa, which specializes in hair-care products. As a mother of three living in North Charleston, South Carolina, she works full time for the South Carolina Department of Education teaching high school Spanish and works part-time with Picasa. Margarita was born in California, but moved to Summerville, South Carolina at a young age. She attended college at a small Baptist school in Charleston, South Carolina, earning her bachelor's degree in Spanish. She went on to pursue a master's degree online in education with an emphasis in student affairs. Margarita has been working with Picasa and in marketing for three years. She considers herself to be somewhat experienced in marketing of this kind. Of the marketing skills needed to succeed in a MLM company like Picassa, Margarita notes, "I think that oftentimes people don't necessarily buy the product. They buy because they like you and your personality and how you market yourself." She has cultivated a number of distributors under her and maintains a base of buyers to which she continually markets Picasa's new products.

Margarita's professional emails with Picasa filter through her personal Gmail account, and there isn't a hardline distinction between the two realms of Margarita's life: her customers are often friends, family, and personal contacts. However, the majority of the conversations she has as a Market Partner occur via Facebook and text, two platforms outside the scope of this study. Because her connections with Picasa (that is, her clients) are developed through friendships and family relationships, the majority of her business is conducted locally. Of the emails she sent that contain SUSE, all had audiences residing within the Southern states.

Margarita identifies as Chicana, and her family emigrated from Mexico to the United States before she was born. In her childhood home, Spanish was the primary spoken language, and what Margarita considers to be her first language, though she is also fluent in English. Of the influence of SUSE on her language, Margarita says:

I'm a Spanish teacher, and I try to stay rooted to my heritage and the fact that I am a Spanish speaker first. I really try to remember that and to stay grounded to that. However, I have inherited some [SUSE] phrases along the way. And then, of course, my husband is an English teacher who is *very* Southern, so I've picked up a lot of his phrases.

Margarita's use of SUSE phrases in her email communications is sparse, but her orientation toward the language variety is positive, as often she finds SUSE to be a marker of respect when speaking to others also from the South.

Maria

Maria is an Account and Project Manager at Velocity Marketing, the same agency at which Ashley is the Agency Principal and Eliza is the Public Relations Director. Maria has been working at Velocity Marketing for two-and-a-half years and has a total of sixteen years of overall experience in marketing²⁶. Because of these years in the field, she considers herself to be a late-career professional and a semi-expert, noting "Sixteen years is a *long* time." She grew up in North Charleston, South Carolina, where she currently

²⁶ Since conducting my interview with Maria on September 5, 2020 and the writing of this dissertation, Maria was laid off from Velocity Marketing due to economic strains of the COVID-19 Pandemic. She has since secured another position as a Marketing Director of a local automotive business. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will refer to her as currently employed by Velocity Marketing, as this was her status at the time of the interview and the gathering of artifacts.

resides. She holds a bachelor's degree in marketing from South Carolina State University and a master's degree in business administration from Webster University. At Velocity, her duties are vast. When asked about what her responsibilities are, she said:

Everything. [laughs] Sorry, no that's not true. Managing budgets, project management from conception to completion that included anything from establishing a budget up to designing the concept for creative, whether it be scripts for radio or TV or print ads. I handled moving projects through the production department, getting approval from clients, coordinating co-op funds, scheduling with various vendors, invoices, and billing.

This wide range of responsibilities and need for continued coordination inside and outside the agency resulted in Maria²⁷ having the largest sample set of emails for review with over 7,000 outgoing messages.

Velocity Marketing is a mid-sized marketing firm with approximately fifteen employees²⁸ that serves a national client base in six markets outside of the Southern states: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, TX; St. Louis, Missouri; Palm Spring, CA; and Rancho Mirage, CA. These markets are accompanied by 18 markets served in the Southern states. The scope of clients is vast, including retail clients (such as South Carolina Gear²⁹ with store locations in five Southern states and GiGi's Luxury

²⁷ Maria's email data spans from January 1, 2018 to September 5, 2020 (the date of our interview).

²⁸ With the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, Velocity Marketing has scaled back to five employees, implementing layoffs in mid-2020 as marketing efforts began to slow and clients began to cut their marketing budgets. For the purposes of this project, I have continued to categorize Velocity Marketing as a mid-sized agency (instead of a micro-agency), as the majority of email communications occurred while the agency still had approximately 15 full-time employees.

²⁹ Client names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

Boutique in Charleston, SC), automotive clients (from luxury Porsche and Rolls-Royce dealerships to quality domestic dealerships for Chevrolet and GMC), and healthcare providers (laser eye care and cosmetic procedures). Communications range from internal messages and conversations with local and national clients to emails sent to contacts from automotive manufacturers in Europe. Specifically, Maria works with automotive clients, and their offices are spread throughout the United States, offering her the opportunity to communicate via email with clients and vendors from coast-to-coast with 40% of Maria's emails containing SUSE markers directed towards audiences living outside of the Southern United States.

Maria identifies as African American. She considers herself to be a Southerner and a speaker of SUSE, and she sees a strong connection between SUSE and African American Vernacular English (AAVE). She says:

There's a lot of overlap between the two [SUSE and AAVE]. I think there's a perception maybe with African Americans that you can't speak as freely as you would want to when not among other African Americans in the workplace, just because some terminology we may use may not be known, but [SUSE] is just normal to me, so I don't see it as out of place at work.

Whereas she may hold back some on incorporating markers of AAVE, Maria sees SUSE as part of normal workplace communication in the South, and there's just one instance in which she may not be comfortable inserting that variety into her communications. She remarks, "In initial communications, where I'm just meeting a client or just getting to know a client, I would strictly use professional words, so I would say in the beginning stages of meeting a client until I felt comfortable enough to use those Southern-isms."

Yet, the use of SUSE is significant for Maria in maintaining positive workplace relationships after an initial meeting.

Olivia

Olivia is a Partner Brand Success Manager at a national food delivery company, Send It. She has been working in this position for less than a year, but she has nine years of overall experience in marketing and considers herself to be mid-career. Olivia is from Florence, South Carolina and currently resides in Charleston, South Carolina. She attended the University of South Carolina, earning her bachelor's degree in marketing management, and she attended The Citadel, earning her Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in marketing. In addition to her work with Send It, she teaches introductory marketing courses at the College of Charleston as an adjunct instructor.

Olivia's work with Send It primarily focuses on creating marketing and advertising partnerships with major brands that are delivered to customers' homes, encouraging those customers to order the brands advertised. Through these partnerships, Olivia also provides sales reports that let the brands know how their advertisements are leading to sales. The overall marketing team at Send It is nationwide and has roughly 100 people on it; Olivia's team, based in Charleston, South Carolina, is smaller and functions as a branch of the company's internal marketing team. Olivia's emails, for the most part, are only sent to clients³⁰. All internal communications happen through Slack, a platform

³⁰ Because Olivia has only been with Send It for a few months, her email data spans February 15, 2020 (her start date at Send It) to August 25, 2020 (the date of our interview).

outside the scope of this study. Her client-base is national, offering Olivia the opportunity to communicate with audiences across the United States.

Polly

Like Courtney, Polly is a Physician Liaison with a healthcare facility, First Care. She does not work directly with patients; instead, she serves as the marketing connection between the facility, which provides radiation therapy to cancer patients, and local referring physicians and hospitals. She has been in this position for 18 years, and she considers herself to be a late-career professional and an expert in her field. Polly was born in Georgetown, South Carolina, and she now resides approximately 20 miles away in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina, where she has lived for 32 years. She attended high school in coastal South Carolina and opted to begin working directly after graduation.

Polly works at a specific First Care location in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The larger company, First Care, is a national medical organization with headquarters in Australia, China, and Spain. First Care recently acquired Polly's office in 2020 from the previous owners, Fox Oncology, based in Florida³¹. First Care has one to two physician liaisons in each market, and Polly is the only one in the Myrtle Beach market. These physician liaisons make up part of the company's in-house marketing team. The majority of Polly's contacts are local, and all emails³² with markers of SUSE went to audiences residing in the Southern United States. However, in the two weeks leading up to our

³¹ This transition is significant because my interview with Polly took place in the midst of this transition, so some emails were sent under the company Fox Oncology and some under the company First Care. However, despite the shift in ownership, little changed (as of the time of our interview) in the day-to-day interactions of Polly with her contacts.

³² Polly's email data spans from January 1, 2018 to August 8, 2020 (the date of our interview).

interview, Polly was just beginning to communicate with contacts across the globe (due to the purchase of the company by First Care), though none of these communications contained SUSE markers.

Shelby

Shelby is the owner of Oak Hope Consulting, a small marketing and sales consulting firm based in Goose Creek, South Carolina. Shelby has worked in marketing for 15 years, and two-and-a-half years ago, she opened Oak Hope to help small local businesses grow their marketing and sales efforts. Shelby was born in Charleston, South Carolina and now resides in Goose Creek (18 miles from Charleston). She attended high school in the Lowcountry and began working in sales immediately after graduation. She has since grown her career to include an expertise in marketing and now considers herself to be a late-career professional and senior-level.

Oak Hope Consulting has a small client base, and Shelby works as the owner and sole employee. Of her day-to-day experiences, she explains, “I do sales consulting as well as marketing consulting, depending on what the client needs, so a lot of my day-to-day depends on which client that I'm working with. For example, I have a client I'm working with right now that I have to do *all* of her marketing because she's a startup, and she's just opening her a new salon. But some just hire me for sales consulting.” Her primary contacts in her professional email are her clients with Oak Hope Consulting, all of whom are based in the Southern United States. For some clients, she has a separate email address with the clients' URL and client-specific communications filter through that address so that external emails send as though she is an employee of her clients’

company. For the purposes and scope of this project, we only searched emails³³ sent from Shelby's Oak Hope address, as she did not have explicit permission to view and share emails on her clients' servers.

Sloane

Sloane is a Social Media Community Manager at Keane Lee Marketing, a small yet national micro-firm based in Charleston, South Carolina. Sloane is from North Augusta, South Carolina, and she attended college at the University of South Carolina, where she earned her bachelor's degree in communications. After graduation, Sloane moved to Mount Pleasant, South Carolina to begin her career. Sloane has been working at Keane Lee Marketing for two years, but she has been in the field much longer. She began her career in public relations nine years ago, and seven years ago, she transitioned to social media management. In social media management specifically, she considers herself to be a mid-level professional. She explains, "I would consider myself mid-career because it [social media marketing] just kind of started in 2009. It wasn't even, you know, taught in college because it didn't exist then."

Keane Lee Marketing is best known for their representation of Southern Soda Brand³⁴, a popular cult-following soda with roots in the American South. Sloane is one of just a few team members, but she works closely with the executive team at Southern Soda Brand. Although this is the company's primary client, it does have several smaller businesses on their roster, all based in Southern states. Sloane's daily activities include developing social media campaigns (paid and organic), implementing those campaigns,

³³ Shelby's email data spans from January 1, 2018 to August 26, 2020 (the date of our interview).

³⁴ Clients' names have been changed to protect anonymity.

and generating data that demonstrates the success of the company's social media marketing efforts. All of her communications³⁵ occur with those residing and working in the Southern United States. Sloane's primary workplace communication medium is not email; instead, she most frequently speaks with her internal team via Slack and with customers on behalf of her clients via various social media communication platforms. Because these avenues of communication are outside of the scope of this project, the only documents examined were Sloane's emails.

Truvy

Truvy is the Office Manager at a local HVAC company, Factory Heating and Air, in Hanahan, South Carolina. As an Office Manager, she not only maintains the company's administrative functions, but she also manages all of Factory's marketing efforts, from advertisements and billboards to social media communications. Truvy has been working for Factory Heating and Air in this capacity for twelve years, and she has worked in marketing overall for sixteen years. Truvy was also employed by *Lowcountry Home* magazine (the same company as Anne, although their tenure there never overlapped) for eight years in advertising sales while also maintaining her position at Factory Heating and Air. She considers herself to be a late-career professional, noting, "For real, though, I've done this for a while."

Factory Heating and Air is a family-run business specializing in repair and installation of heating and cooling systems; they have a reputation in the Charleston community for reliability and trustworthiness. In her position, Truvy handles the

³⁵ Sloane's email data spans from October 1, 2018 (her first day at Keane Lee Marketing) to August 7, 2020 (the date of our interview).

advertising and social media pages for the company, atop her other duties in billing and day-to-day project management. She emails³⁶ regularly with builders, homeowners, and vendors to arrange orders, place ads, and coordinate jobs. To communicate with the team internally, she uses text messages, not email. Primarily, her email contacts are local to the Charleston, South Carolina area, and she has little to no contact with audiences outside of the Southern United States or internationally. Although all communications sent through the Factory Heating and Air email address are composed and sent by Truvy, they are attributed to the owner of the company, Spud.

From Methods to Action

With these methods in place, supported by a methodology that links discourse, genre, and rhetorical analyses, I proceeded with my study. The twelve women described above all participated in an interview and an email search (with the limitations of Courtney's HIPPA concerns). As we searched emails, each participant helped with the coding by explaining the rhetorical situation of the email document. The results of putting this method into action with these participants are detailed in the following chapter.

³⁶ Truvy's email data spans from January 1, 2018 to August 26, 2020 (the date of our interview).

CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

From the methods and methodology outlined in Chapter 3, I have extracted two types of data: quantitative data that offer a sweeping picture of how participants use SUSE and qualitative data from the conducted interviews that offer a peek into the interdiscursive nature of and motivations behind SUSE use in the workplace. This chapter presents the quantitative results, and it is followed by a chapter that discusses the implications of this quantitative data using the qualitative results gleaned from email content and interviews. These two types of data viewed in tandem allow me to offer a robust picture of participants' SUSE use in action and demonstrate the trends illuminated by this line of inquiry. As a reminder of the contextual details of the participants, readers may wish to habitually refer back to the "Participants" section at the end of Chapter 3 when needed, as this section provides important information about the background and workplace of each woman in this study.

Overall Quantitative Results

The use of SUSE in professional email communication accounts for 3.01% of all outgoing messages from all twelve participants of this study. While that number is small, the influence of SUSE on workplace writing varies greatly by individual. For instance, for Shelby, SUSE only appeared in 0.17% of all her sent messages. Yet for Courtney, SUSE permeated 11.41% of her messages, which is not an insignificant percentage. Though some participants have but a small percentage of SUSE use, the frequency of

these messages should not discount the importance of the language in communication, as users (even those who employ the language infrequently) implement SUSE strategically to position themselves in a certain way toward their audience.

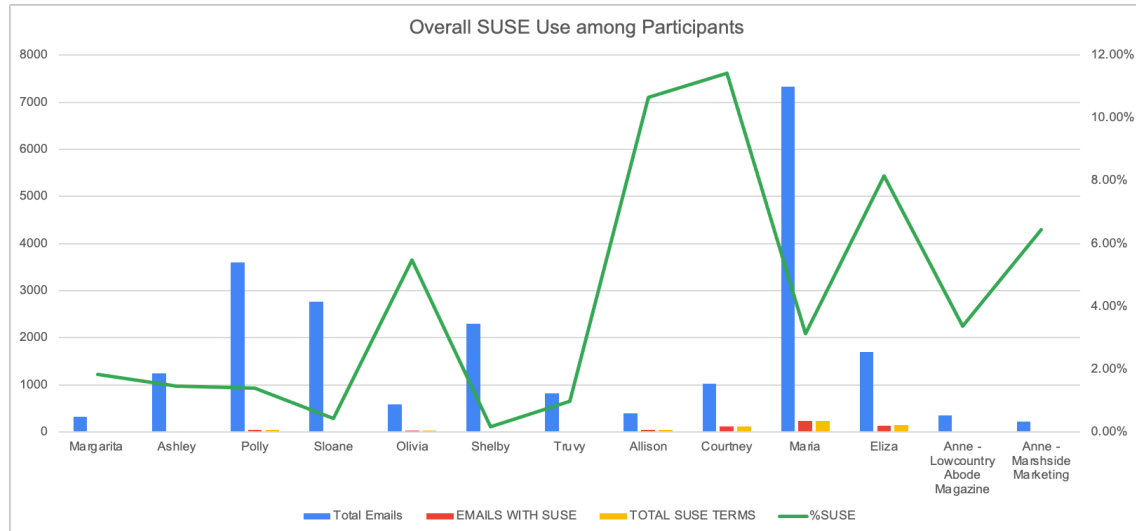


Figure 4.1: Overall SUSE Use among Participants. The chart above demonstrates the overall SUSE use among participants. The green line shows the trends in use (based on the percentage of SUSE markers in emails). The blue bars offer the total emails sent by the participant within the studied timeframe. The red bars demonstrate how many emails contain markers of SUSE, and the yellow bars demonstrate how many SUSE markers were used in total (slightly different from number of emails containing SUSE because some emails contained more than one marker).

Overall, writers are most likely to use, in written email communication, those terms most closely associated with mainstream Southern English, or that which is more readily accepted across the United States (*you all*, for instance, instead of *y'all*, categorized as a distinctly Southern feature). Those distinctly Southern terms appeared less frequently, though they were not completely absent from participants' communications. Furthermore, participants overwhelmingly used SUSE when in conversation with clients and vendors, both categories representing audiences outside the organization. Nearly 70% of messages containing SUSE fell into the genre categories of requests or informative emails, and the tone of the messages was nearly always friendly

or neutral (with the exception of just a few confrontational messages from Eliza, Maria, Anne, and Allison). Among the participants, overall SUSE use varied greatly, with some (like Maria) heavily implementing her SUSE into most genres and scenarios. On the other hand, some, like Margarita and Anne, rarely used the regional dialect at all. These differences among participants are directly related to their workplace contexts and their perceptions toward the language (to be discussed in Chapter 5). The next sections in this chapter reveal in detail the results of data analysis based on SUSE markers, audience, genre, and tone—first for the entirety of the email sample, then by participant.

Quantitative Results: Markers of SUSE, Audience, Genre, and Tone

Markers of SUSE

The markers of SUSE, listed in full in Chapter 3, represent the terms used to search participants' emails. In the process of this search, I uncovered that in a total of 22,662 emails sent from 12 participants, 683 of those contained markers of SUSE, and in total, there were 693 instances of SUSE present in the artifacts. Participants, though, did not use all the terms searched. In fact, the only terms in use were *ma'am/mam*, *sir*, *y'all*, personal dative pronouns, multimodals, *ran across*, *you all*, *bless*, *goodness*, *waiting*, *til/till*, *gumption*, *holla*, and *blinds*³⁷. All other SUSE search terms were absent from all participants' emails. The following chart details the percentage of each term used across all participants.

³⁷ Note that the last two items *holla* and *blinds*, are terms specifically associated with particular participants (Courtney and Anne, respectively). These terms were identified in the interviews as SUSE markers used by the participant, but not searched for in other participants' outboxes.

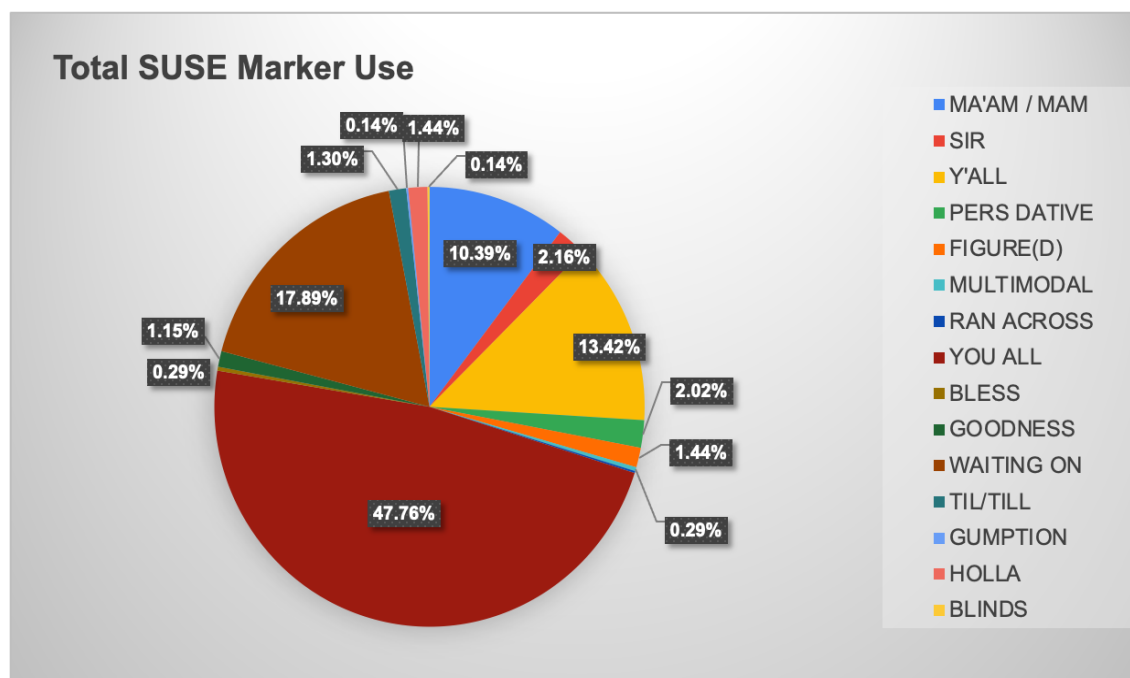


Figure 4.2: Total SUSE Marker Use. The chart above demonstrates the overall SUSE marker use among participants.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, markers of SUSE were divided into two types: those words one likely *only* hears in the Southern United States (*distinctly Southern*) and those connected with SUSE, but often heard outside of the Southern United States (*mainstream Southern*). For instance, *y'all* is typically only spoken in the South, whereas *you all*—still a Southern iteration of the second-person plural—may sometimes be heard across the United States. Participants tended to use mainstream-Southern terms (*you all*, *bless*, *goodness*, *waiting*, *til/till*, *gumption*) much more frequently than distinctly Southern terms (*ma'am/mam*, *sir*, *y'all*, personal dative pronouns, multimodals, *ran across*) with 29.87% of the terms used coming from the distinctly Southern list and 68.54% coming from the mainstream-Southern list³⁸.

³⁸ The remaining 1.59% accounts for the uses of *holla* and *blinds*, which are terms specifically associated with particular participants.

Examined by participant, observers can see the variation between each woman's SUSE use. For a visual representation, following each data description is a pie chart. For **Allison**, in 394 total sent emails, 42 documents contained markers of SUSE and 44 total markers of SUSE were incorporated into her conversations (two emails contained two separate SUSE markers). Her word choices included 1 instance (2.27%) of personal dative pronoun use, 30 instances (68.18%) of *you all*, and 13 instances (29.55%) of *waiting on*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Allison's outgoing mailbox. For **Anne**, in 356 total sent emails from the *Lowcountry Abode* account, 12 documents contained markers of SUSE. Her word choices included 5 instances (41.67%) of *ma'am*, 5 instances (41.67%) of *y'all*, 1 instance (8.33%) of *you all*, and 1 (8.33%) instance of *blinds*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Anne's outgoing mailbox from *Lowcountry Abode*. For her Marshside Marketing account, in 217 total sent emails, 14 documents contained markers of SUSE, and there were 15 total markers of SUSE (one email contained two separate SUSE markers). Her word choices included 15 instances (100.00%) of *y'all*. All other Southern features were absent from Anne's outgoing mailbox from Marshside Marketing.

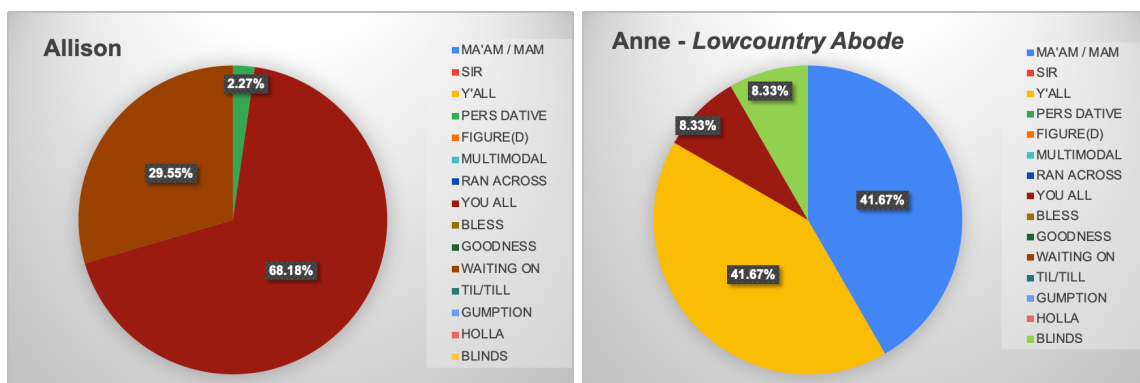


Figure 4.3: A Pie Chart Depicting Allison's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.4: A Pie Chart Depicting Anne's SUSE Markers

For **Ashley**, in 1,239 total sent emails, 18 documents featured markers of SUSE. Her word choices included 1 instance (5.56%) of *y'all*, 2 instances (11.11%) of *figure(d)*, 2 instances (11.11%) of *you all*, 4 instances (22.22%) of *goodness*, 4 instances (22.22%) of *waiting on*, 4 instances (22.22%) of *til/till*, and 1 instance (5.56%) of *gumption*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Ashley's outgoing mailbox. **Courtney** had one of the highest percentages of SUSE use in her outbox (11.41%). Of the specific words she used, *y'all* and *you all* accounted for 40.17% each; personal dative pronouns, *goodness*, and multimodals accounted for 0.85% each; *waiting on* accounted for 5.98%; and *till/til* accounted for 2.56%. Additionally, Courtney introduced a new term that she identified as SUSE and one that she uses frequently: *holla*. This term appeared in 8.55% of her outgoing messages.

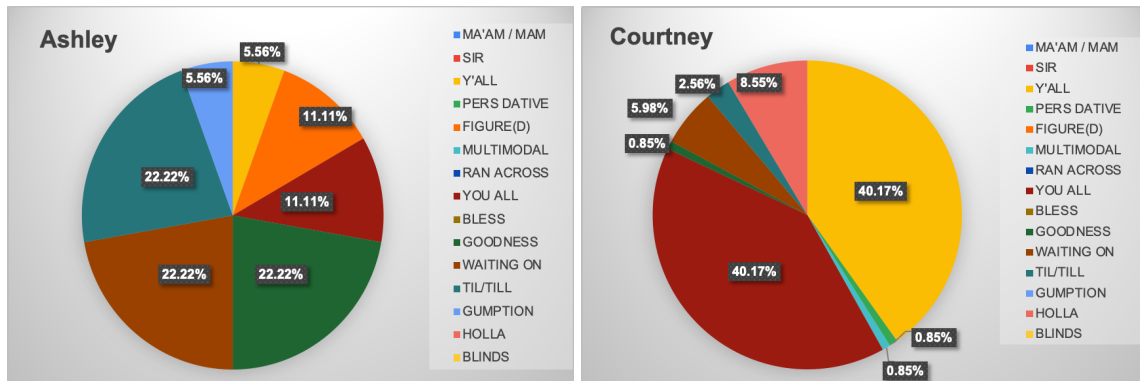


Figure 4.5: A Pie Chart Depicting Ashley's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.6: A Pie Chart Depicting Courtney's SUSE Markers

In 1,691 of **Eliza's** total sent emails, 138 documents contained markers of SUSE, and there were 143 SUSE markers, as some emails contained more than one. Her word choices included 16 instances (11.19%) of *ma'am*, 1 instance (0.70%) of *sir*, 20 instances (13.99%) of *y'all*, 2 instances (1.40%) of personal dative pronoun use, 1 instance (0.70%) of *figure(d)*, 94 instances (65.73%) of *you all*, 2 instances (1.40%) of *goodness*, and 7

instances of *waiting on*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Eliza's outgoing mailbox. For **Margarita**, in 327 total sent emails, only 6 documents contained markers of SUSE. Her word choices included 5 instances (83.33%) of *you all* and 1 instance (16.67%) of *goodness*.

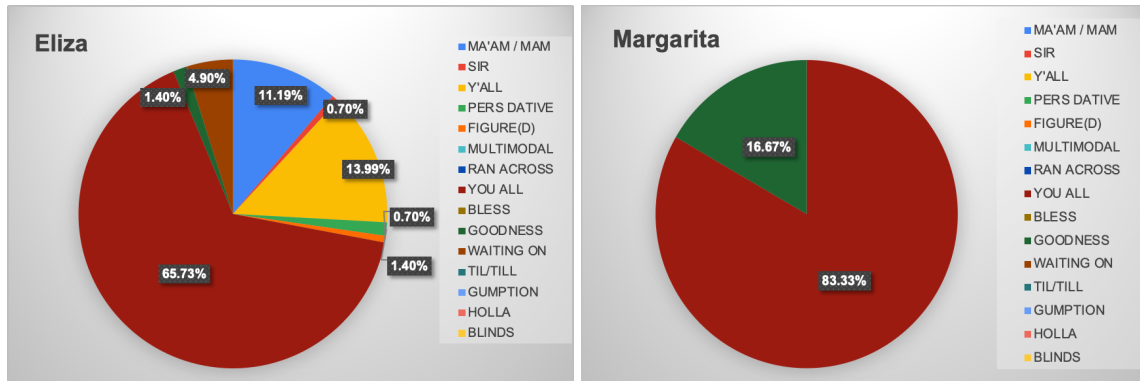


Figure 4.7: A Pie Chart Depicting Eliza's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.8: A Pie Chart Depicting Margarita's SUSE Markers

In 7,334 of **Maria**'s total sent emails, 230 documents featured markers of SUSE and 231 total markers of SUSE were incorporated into her conversations. Her word choices included 17 instances (7.36%) of *ma'am/mam*, 5 instances (2.16%) of *sir*, 1 instance (2.16%) of *y'all*, 8 instances (3.46%) of personal dative pronoun use, 111 instances (48.05%) of *you all*, and 82 instances (35.5%) of *waiting on*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Maria's outgoing mailbox. In 584 of **Olivia**'s total sent emails, 32 documents contained markers of SUSE (5.48%). Her word choices included 2 instances (6.25%) of *ma'am/mam*, 1 instance (3.13%) of *y'all*, 1 instance (3.13%) of a multimodal use, 17 instances (53.13%) of *you all*, 9 instances (28.13%) of *waiting on*, and 2 instances (6.25%) of *till/til*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Olivia's outgoing mailbox.

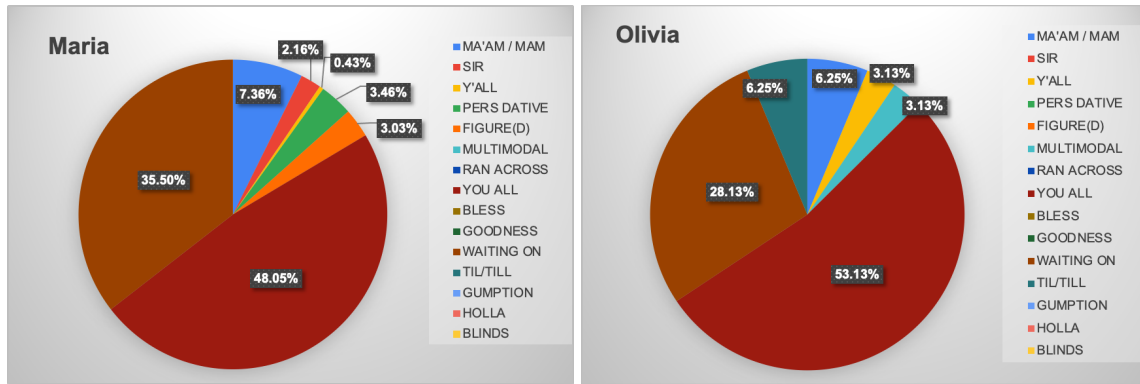


Figure 4.9: A Pie Chart Depicting Maria's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.10: A Pie Chart Depicting Olivia's SUSE Markers

For **Polly**, in 3599 total sent emails, 50 documents contained markers of SUSE (1.39%). Her word choices included 30 instances (60.00%) of *ma'am/mam*, 8 instances (16.00%) of *sir*, 1 instance (2.00%) of *ran across*, 1 instance (2.00%) of multimodal use, 8 instances (16.00%) of *you all*, and 2 instances (4.00%) of *bless*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Polly's outgoing mailbox. In 2,305 of **Shelby**'s total sent emails, only 4 documents showcased markers of SUSE (0.17%) and there were only five instances of SUSE terms appearing (one email contained two markers of SUSE). Her word choices included 1 instance (20.00%) of *ma'am/mam*, 3 instances (60.00%) of *y'all*, and 1 instance (20.00%) of *waiting on*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Shelby's outgoing mailbox.

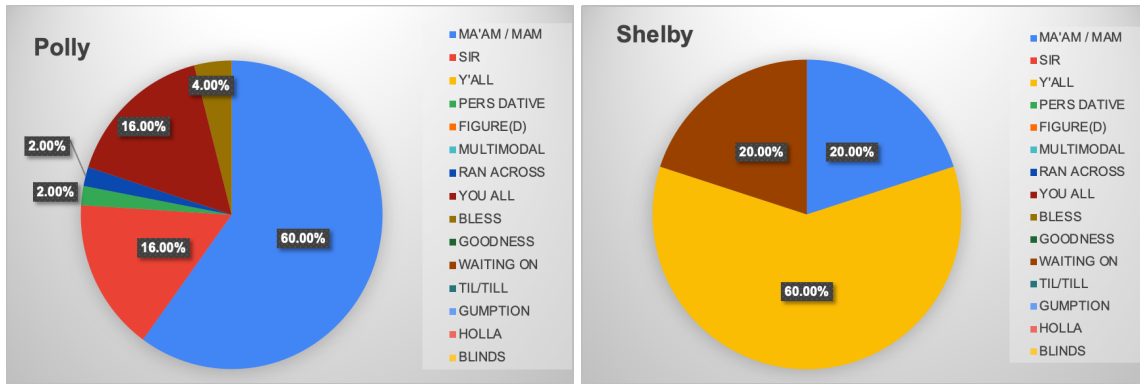


Figure 4.11: A Pie Chart Depicting Polly's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.12: A Pie Chart Depicting Shelby's SUSE Markers

In 2,765 of **Sloane's** total sent emails, 12 documents contained markers of SUSE (0.43%). Her word choices included 1 instance (8.33%) of *ma'am/mam*, 1 instance (8.33%) of *sir*, and 10 instances (83.33%) of *you all*. All other Southern features were absent. For **Truvy**, in 826 total sent emails, 8 documents had markers of SUSE (0.97%). Her word choices included 1 instance (12.50%) of personal dative pronoun use, 6 instances (75.00%) of *you all*, and 1 instance (12.50%) of *waiting on*. All other Southern features were not present in the entirety of Truvy's outgoing mailbox.

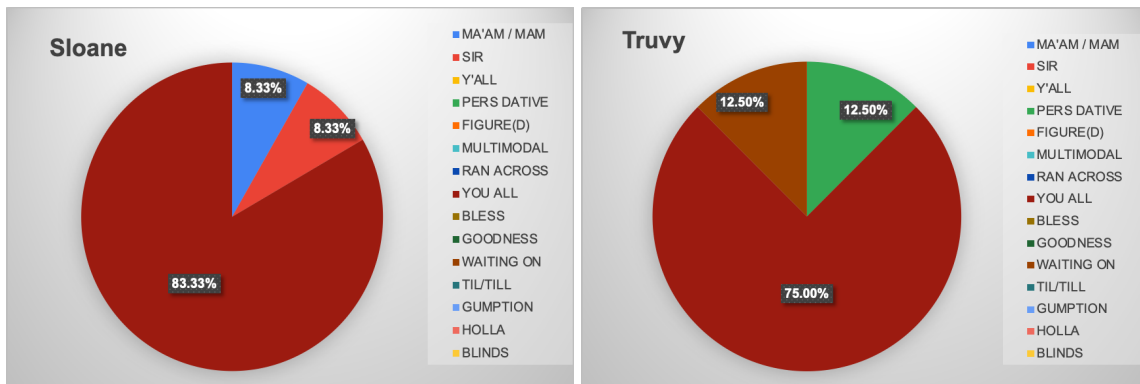


Figure 4.13: A Pie Chart Depicting Sloane's SUSE Markers | Figure 4.14: A Pie Chart Depicting Truvy's SUSE Markers

To place all of these numbers in perspective, the pie charts in this section offer a visual representation of the numerical data. In these charts, observers may notice trends

in word choice, particularly the overarching use of *you all* (a mainstream Southern feature) represented by the garnet pie chart color. Intricacies of these choices will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, as the quantitative data here provides only a sweeping overview of the terms used by participants through this study. Forthcoming qualitative data in Chapter 5 will help shed some light on the usage of these terms, providing email content context along with interview insight into the how and why certain terms were used (or not) by participants within their given workplace environment.

Audience

Participants most often use SUSE when speaking to clients³⁹ with 39.22% of total SUSE-marked email exchanges directed toward client audiences, followed closely by an audience of vendors (19.26%). As readers may recall from Chapter 3, I categorized the audience by *client* (one paying for the services of the writer), *co-worker high/equal/low* (one who works in the same company as the writer of higher, equal, or lower rank in the business), *colleague* (a work contact employed by another company), *boss* (one to whom the writer reports), *community member* (a contact in the community that does not work at another company with which the writer conducts business), *vendor* (a contact with whom the writer obtains a good or service), *personal* (a contact that is neither friend or family, but associated with personal business and is contacted through an office email system), *friend/family* (a friend or family member not associated with the writer's career but contacted through an office email system), and *mass email* (an email sent to more than five recipients).

³⁹ Note: This number could be skewed because nearly all participants had clients to communicate with, whereas not all participants had bosses or employees to communicate with (for instance).

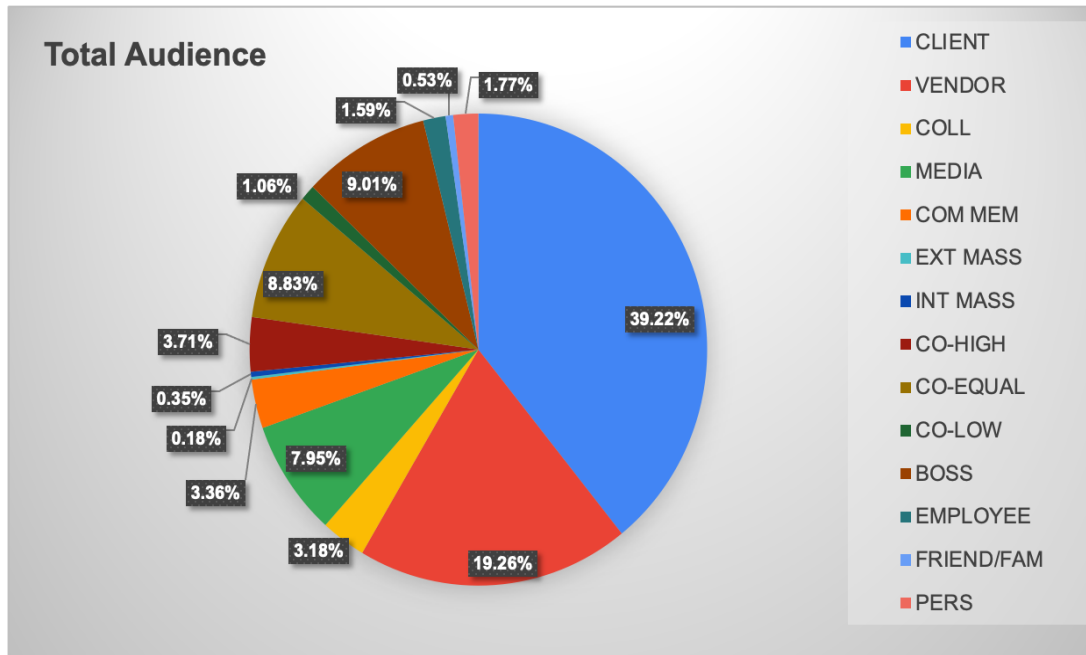


Figure 4.15: Total Audience. The chart above demonstrates the overall audiences addressed with emails containing markers of SUSE.

Viewing this data by participant, instead of an overall usage chart, observers can note the trends among participants, referring frequently back to the “Participants” section of Chapter 3 to contextualize the audiences in question.

For **Allison**’s audience, of the 42 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 4.76% were sent to clients, 35.71% were sent to vendors, 2.38% were internal mass emails, 35.71% were sent to coworkers on an equal level, 4.76% were sent to coworkers under Allison, and 16.67% were sent to Allison’s bosses. There were no emails sent to colleagues, community members, media, coworkers in higher positions, or employees because Allison does not have regular contact with any of these audience categories (for example, she has no employees working under her and does not work with community members or the media). She does not use her work account for emails to any personal contacts or friends and family. Although she does sometimes send mass external emails, none contained markers of SUSE. For audience of the emails sent during **Anne**’s tenure

at *Lowcountry Abode*, of the 12 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 33.33% were sent to clients, 25.00% were sent to coworkers of equal rank, 33.33% were sent to coworkers of lower rank, and 8.33% were external mass emails. Although Anne frequently emailed colleagues, community members, media, and her boss, no emails to these recipients contain markers of SUSE. Because she had no coworkers of higher rank in this position, this category has no email artifacts. Anne did not use her work account at *Lowcountry Abode* for emails to any personal contacts or friends and family. At Marshside Marketing, of the 14 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 100.00% were sent to clients⁴⁰. In her position there as Senior Marketing Strategist, she did not have contact with any colleagues, community members, or media. Because of the small size of the agency, there were no coworkers to contact, and she did not send any internal or external mass emails. Although she did send emails to her boss, none contained markers of SUSE.

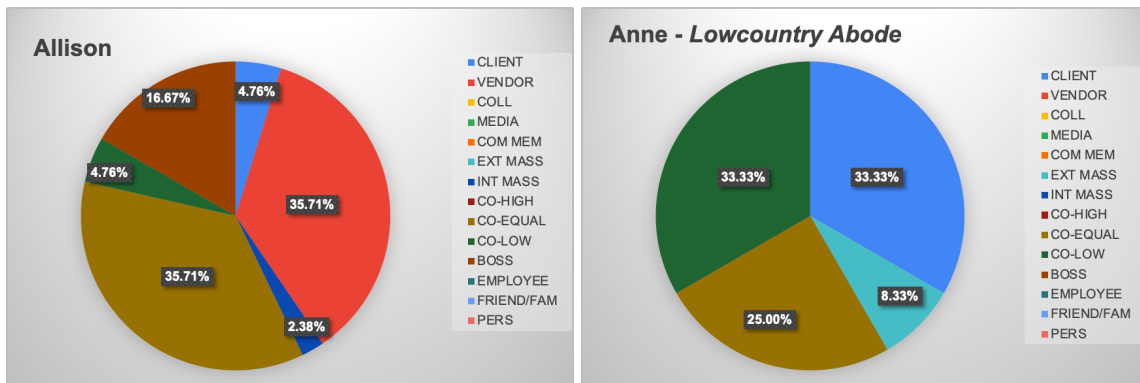


Figure 4.16: A Pie Chart Depicting Allison's Email Audiences | Figure 4.17: A Pie Chart Depicting Anne's Email Audiences in Her Position at Lowcountry Abode Magazine

⁴⁰ There is no chart for Anne's Marshside Marketing audience because the chart would only depict 100-percent.

For **Ashley**'s audience, of the 18 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 16.67% were sent to clients, 27.78% were sent to vendors, 50.00% were sent to employees, and 5.56% were sent to friends or family. Although Ashley frequently sends both internal and external mass emails and she emails colleagues, community members, media, and personal contacts, no emails to these recipients contained markers of SUSE. Because Ashley is the Agency Principal, she has no coworkers or boss to communicate with, so there are no artifacts in existence for these categories. For **Eliza**, of the 138 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 39.86% were sent to clients, 1.45% were sent to vendors, 32.61% were sent to the media, 11.59% were sent to community members, 5.07% were sent to coworkers of equal rank, and 8.07% were sent to her boss. Although Eliza frequently sends both internal and external mass emails and she emails colleagues, coworkers of higher rank, and coworkers of lower rank, no emails to these recipients contained markers of SUSE. In this position, Eliza has no employees, so there are no artifacts in existence for this category, and she does not use her business email for personal contacts or communication with friends/family.

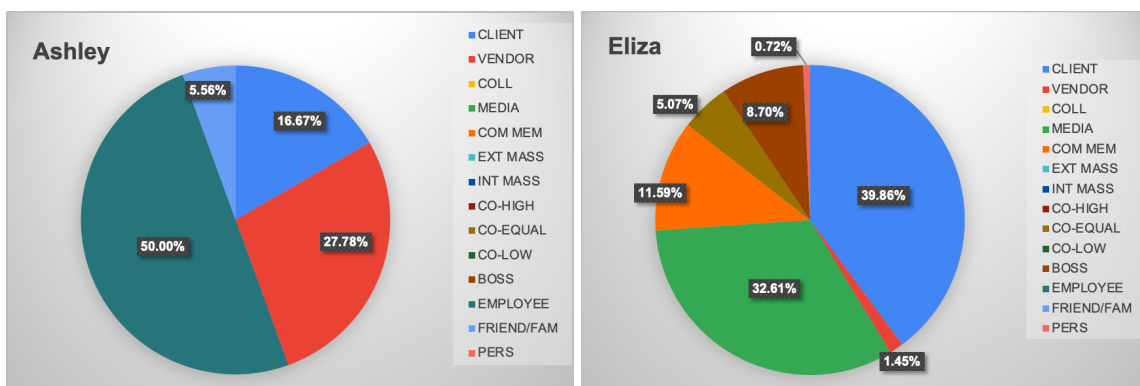


Figure 4.18: A Pie Chart Depicting Ashley's Email Audiences | Figure 4.19: A Pie Chart Depicting Eliza's Email Audiences

For **Margarita**'s audience, of the six email documents containing elements of SUSE, 100% were personal in nature, although Margarita uses the platform to communicate with clients and coworkers of higher and lower rank⁴¹. None of the artifacts that contained markers of SUSE appeared in her business or professional communications for her work with Picasa (although some were related to her position with the South Carolina Department of Education). Of **Maria**'s 230 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 44.35% were sent to clients, 31.741% were sent to vendors, 3.91% were sent to coworkers on a higher level, 9.13% were sent to coworkers on an equal level, and 10.87% were sent to Maria's bosses. Although Maria communicates with colleagues, community members, and coworkers in lower positions, and although she does send mass emails both internally and externally, emails to none of these audiences contained markers of SUSE. Maria does often communicate with the media, but it is categorized differently here, as her relationship with the media is different than that of Eliza (in public relations). While Eliza may work with someone at a news station, categorized as media, Maria would instead work with a sales representative for ad placement, making her contact (with the same news outlet) a vendor instead of a member of the media. Maria has no employees, so there are no emails that fit this audience category, and she does not use her professional email at all for personal emails or communications with friends and family. For **Olivia**'s audience, of the 32 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 90.63% were sent to clients, 6.25% were sent to colleagues, and 3.13% were sent to coworkers on an equal level. Emails sent to any

⁴¹ There is no chart for Margarita's audience because the chart would only depict 100-percent.

audience other than clients are rare, as this outbox is used primarily for client communication (all internal communication happens via Slack). Two emails were categorized as colleagues because Olivia’s relationship with them did not involve the exchange of money, and one email categorized as a coworker only appeared in this search because they were both on the same email as a client. Olivia has no employees, does not send any mass emails, and does not work with vendors or the media, so there are no emails that fit these audiences. She does not use her professional email at all for personal emails or communications with friends and family.

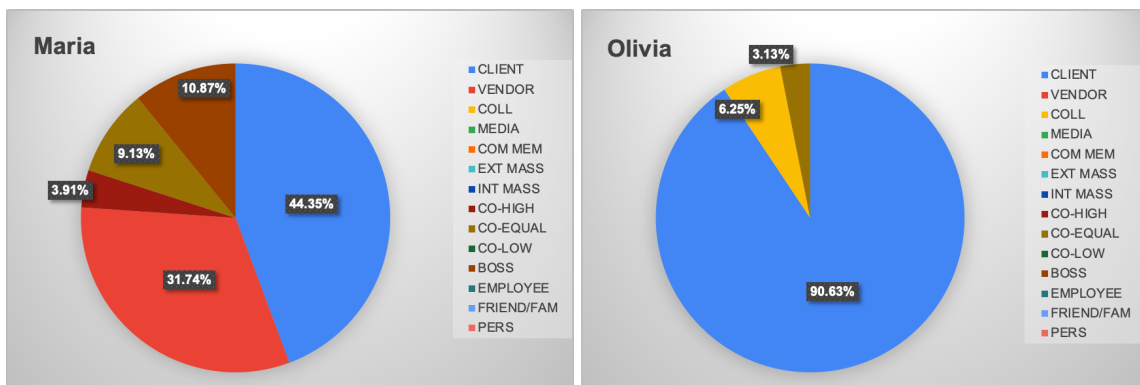


Figure 4.20: A Pie Chart Depicting Maria’s Email Audiences | Figure 4.21: A Pie Chart Depicting Olivia’s Email Audiences

Of **Polly**’s 50 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 18.00% were sent to vendors, 24.00% were sent to colleagues, 6.00% were sent to community members, 2.00% were internal mass emails, 24.00% were sent to coworkers on a higher level, 6.00% were sent to coworkers on an equal level, 10.00% were sent to her boss, 4.00% were sent to friends/family, and 6.00% were sent to personal contacts. Although Polly works in marketing, she does not consider herself to have typical clients. Instead, she considers her client-contacts to be colleagues, as she builds relationships with them whether they send patients to her office or not, and her relationship with them isn’t based

on any sort of ongoing contract or monetary exchange. Polly does not regularly send emails to the media, as the company has a separate public relations team, or to coworkers on a lower level, as no one works under Polly. Though she does send some external mass emails, none of Polly's emails to these audiences contained markers of SUSE. For **Shelby's** audience, of the 4 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 100.00% were sent to clients⁴². Shelby does often email vendors (emails to whom contained no markers of SUSE), but all other categories are not part of Shelby's regular email audiences. Furthermore, she does not use this account for any personal emails or emails to friends/family.

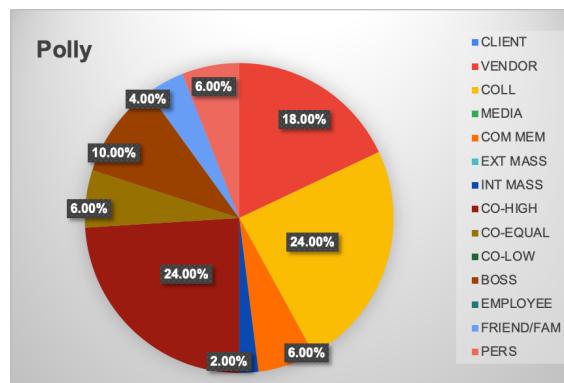


Figure 4.22: A Pie Chart Depicting Polly's Email Audiences

Of **Sloane's** 12 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 41.67% were sent to clients, 8.33% were sent to vendors, 33.33% were sent to colleagues, and 16.67% were sent to her boss. Sloane does often communicate to other audiences included in this study: community members and coworkers of higher and equal rank. She also sends mass internal and external emails, but none of her emails to these audiences contained the searched markers of SUSE. She does not have any coworkers of lower rank, any

⁴² There is no chart for Shelby's audience because the chart would only depict 100-percent.

employees, or any contact with the media, so these categories contain no emails at all. Furthermore, she does not use this account for any personal emails or emails to friends/family. And for **Truvy**'s audience, of the eight email documents containing elements of SUSE, 50.00% were sent to clients and 50.00% were sent to vendors. Truvy does not often communicate with the other categories of audiences via email. Nearly all internal conversations happen via text and all personal messages or those to friends/family are not filtered through this business email address. She also does not send mass emails, externally or internally, as any message addressing the entire company would come from the owner, Spud. Finally, she does not contact community members or the media, as she does not take on any public relations projects for the company.

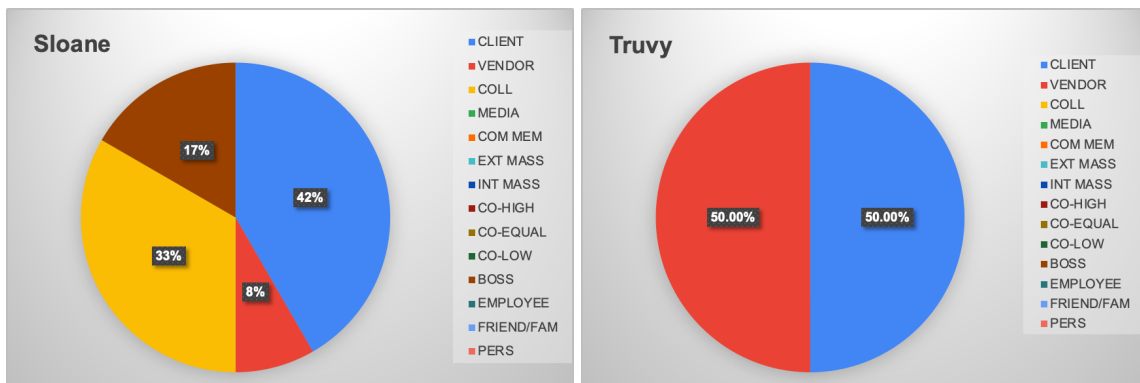


Figure 4.23: A Pie Chart Depicting Sloane's Email Audiences | Figure 4.24: A Pie Chart Depicting Truvy's Email Audiences

In the charts included in this audience section, observers may notice that all participants communicate using SUSE to clients, as client communication is one of the most frequent communications of marketers in general. The significance of this audience—and the factors at play that determine with which clients it is appropriate to use SUSE—is discussed further in Chapter 5, where I pair this quantitative data with the qualitative data from interviews and email content.

Genre

In terms of genre, participants most frequently used SUSE when making a request (40.11%), followed closely by providing information to audiences (28.98%). As readers may recall from Chapter 3, the *request* included any email in which the writer was eliciting specific information or action from her audience. The *response to a request* genre included any email in which the writer was providing information prompted by the email recipient. The *apology* genre included any email in which the writer had made a mistake (whether an “I’m sorry” was included in the text or not). The *informative* email includes primarily stated information that does not require an action from the recipient. *Thank you* emails and *approval* emails express thankfulness (whether they use the phrase “thank you” or not) and approval (respectively) for an action of the recipient. Finally, *chatter* emails contain wholly phatic conversation. Unsurprisingly, many emails contained multiple genres (for instance, requesting approval of a document, then thanking the recipient at the end of the message), but the document was coded for the primary purpose of communication determined in collaboration with the writer of the email document.

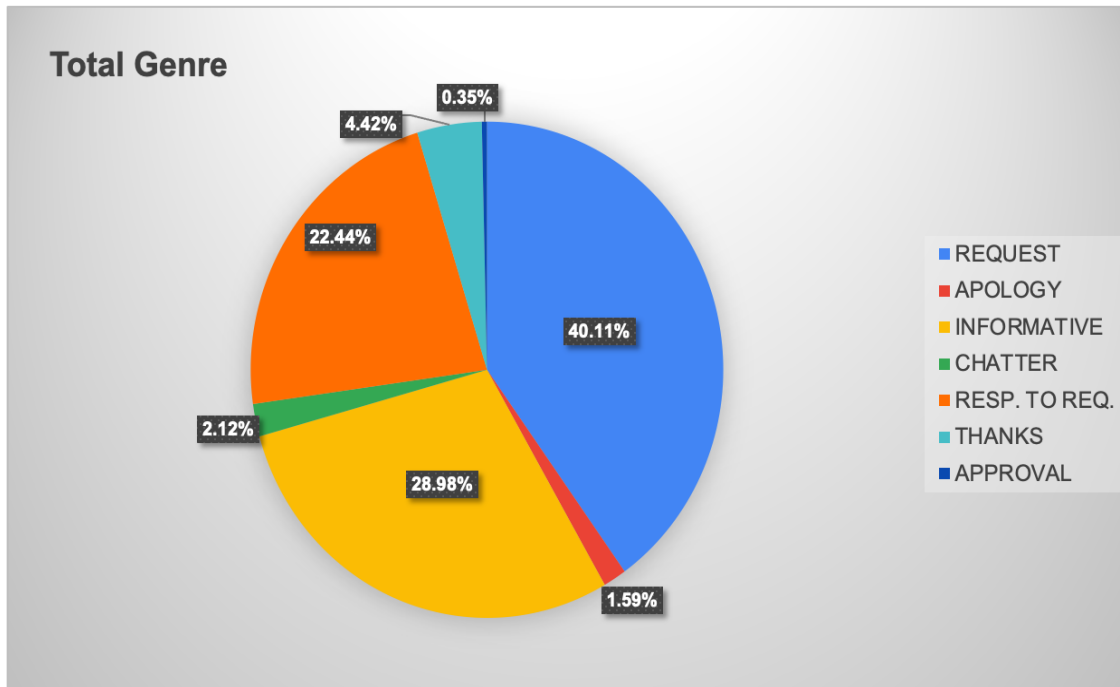


Figure 4.25: Total Genre. The chart above demonstrates the overall genres used containing markers of SUSE.

Viewing the genre data by participant reveals trends among the women in this study as they relate to the participant's workplace, experience, and context (discussed in detail later in Chapter 5). For ease of understanding and readability, the following described data is available in visual form below each description.

For **Allison**, of the 42 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 69.05% were requests, 28.57% were informative, and 2.38% were responses to a request.

Although Allison does send emails in the genres of apology, thanks, and approval, none of these emails contained the searched markers of SUSE.

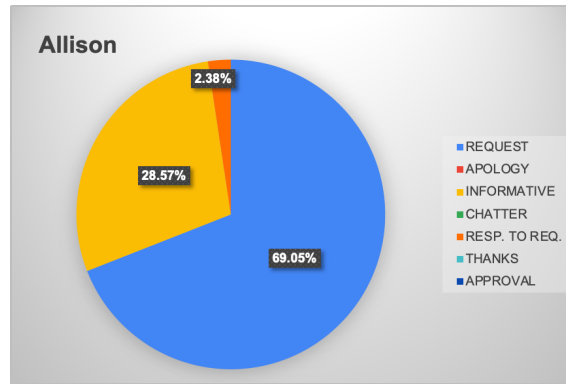


Figure 4.26: A Pie Chart Depicting Allison's Genre Data

In **Anne's** case, of the 12 SUSE email documents sent from the *Lowcountry Abode* account containing elements of SUSE, 41.67% were requests, 8.33% were apologies, 16.67% were responses to a request, 25% were expressing thanks, and 8.33% were approval messages. Although Anne did send informative and chatter emails, none of the emails in these genres contained the searched markers of SUSE. For the 14 SUSE emails sent from the Marshside Marketing account, 57.14% were requests, 28.57% were informative, 7.14% were chatter, and 7.14% expressed thanks. Although Anne did send apology emails and responses to requests in this position, none of the emails in these genres contained the searched markers of SUSE. Anne did not send any approval emails through this account, as her boss (and the owner of the company) was responsible for approving any work, payments, etc.

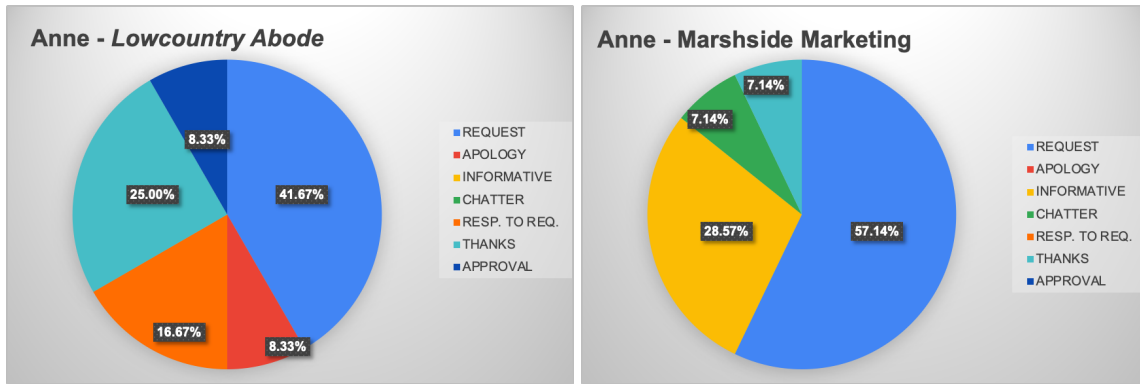


Figure 4.27: A Pie Chart Depicting Anne's Genre Data from Her Position at Lowcountry Abode Magazine | Figure 4.28: A Pie Chart Depicting Anne's Genre Data from Her Position at Marshside Marketing

Of the 18 email documents **Ashley** sent containing elements of SUSE, 38.89% were requests, 33.33% were informative, 5.56% were chatter, and 22.22% were responses to a request. Although Ashley did send apology, thanks, and approval messages, none of the emails in these genres contained the searched markers of SUSE. For **Eliza**, of the 138 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 44.93% were requests, 2.17% were apologies, 35.51% were informative, 2.90% were chatter, 10.87% were responses to a request, and 3.62% were giving thanks. As a PR Director, Eliza rarely gives approval via email (but more frequently asks for that approval of various documents from clients).

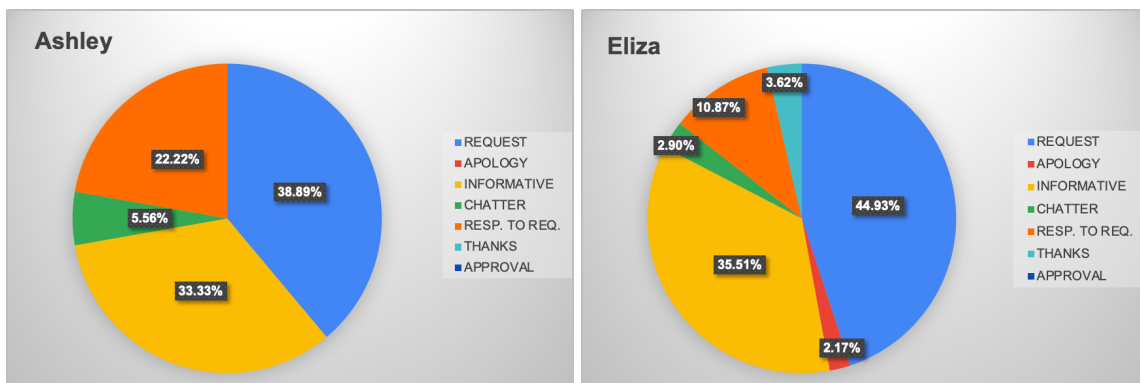


Figure 4.29: A Pie Chart Depicting Ashley's Genre Data | Figure 4.30: A Pie Chart Depicting Eliza's Genre Data

For **Margarita**, of the 6 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 66.67% were requests, 16.67% were informative, and 16.67% were giving thanks. As a Market Partner, Margarita does send responses to requests and (occasionally) apology emails, but none of these genres contained markers of SUSE. There are no instances in which she sends approval emails for her work with Picasa. Of the 230 email documents sent by **Maria** containing elements of SUSE, 36.09% were requests, 2.17% were apologies, 27.39% were informative, 2.61% were chatter, 27.39% were responses to a request, 2.91% expressed thanks, and 0.43% expressed approval. Maria was one of the only participants who had examples of SUSE use in all included genres of email communication.

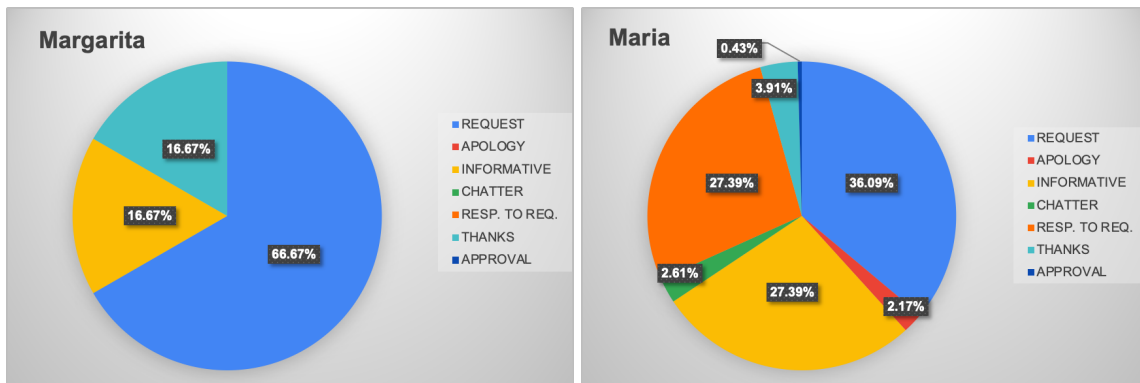


Figure 4.31: A Pie Chart Depicting Margarita's Genre Data | Figure 4.32: A Pie Chart Depicting Maria's Genre Data

Of the 230 email documents sent by **Olivia** containing elements of SUSE, 37.50% were requests, 56.25% were informative, and 6.25% were responses to a request. Although Olivia sends (on occasion) emails expressing thanks, apology, and approval, none of these genres contained markers of SUSE. She does not send chatter emails through this account, as most of the chatter happens with her coworkers on Slack. In **Polly's** dataset, of the 50 email documents containing elements of SUSE, 8.00% were

requests, 8.00% were informative, 72.00% were responses to a request, and 12.00% expressed thanks. Although Polly occasionally sends apologetic emails and emails of approval, none of the emails in these two genres contained markers of SUSE.

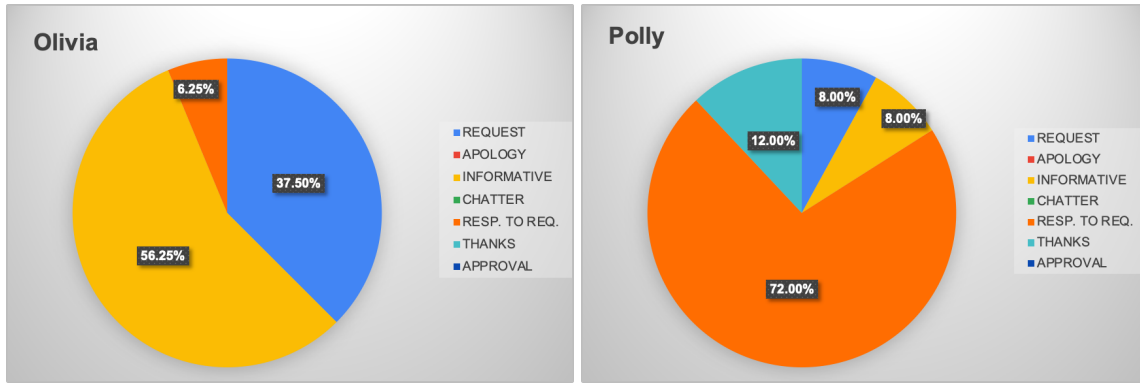


Figure 4.33: A Pie Chart Depicting Olivia's Genre Data | Figure 4.34: A Pie Chart Depicting Polly's Genre Data

Shelby's genre data demonstrate that of the four email documents containing elements of SUSE, 75.00% were requests and 25% were responses to a request. Shelby does communicate in all the other genres included in this study: approval, apology, chatter, informative, and thanks. However, none of her emails in these genres contained markers of SUSE.

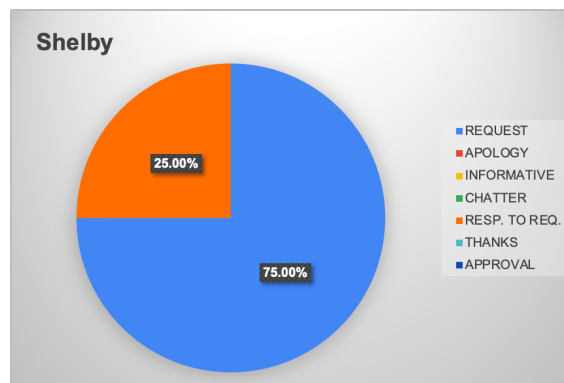


Figure 4.35: A Pie Chart Depicting Shelby's Genre Data

Of the 12 email documents **Sloane** sent containing elements of SUSE, 33.33% were requests, 41.44% were informative, and 25.00% were responses to a request. Sloane

does communicate in all the other genres included in this study: approval, apology, chatter, and thanks. However, none of her emails in these genres contained markers of SUSE. For **Truvy**, of the eight email documents containing elements of SUSE, 75.00% were requests and 25.00% were informative. Truvy does communicate in all the other genres included in this study: approval, apology, chatter, responses to a request, and thanks. However, none of her emails in these genres contained markers of SUSE.

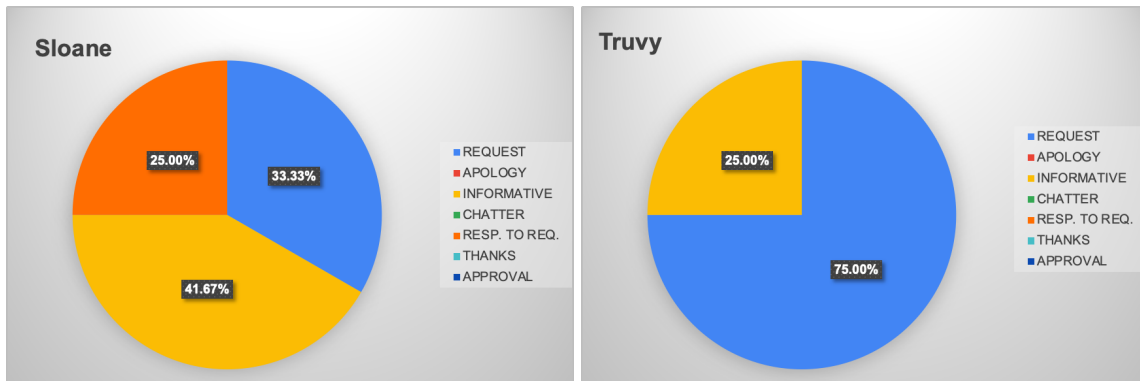


Figure 4.36: A Pie Chart Depicting Sloane's Genre Data | Figure 4.37: A Pie Chart Depicting Truvy's Genre Data

Observers may see from the charts included in this section, which visually represent the data presented in narrative form, that all participants incorporate SUSE in making requests. I discuss this trend in further detail in Chapter 5, in which I couple this quantitative data with qualitative insight from field research.

Tone

As outlined in Chapter 3, I classified the email artifacts in this study by the tone the writer took when composing the email, whether that be *friendly*, *neutral*, *confrontational*, or *hostile*. These details of the relationship between writer and audience were revealed in interview conversations as participants and I searched for email artifacts, as well as in the texts themselves. For instance, if a text included multiple

exclamation points and smiling emojis, I categorized it as *friendly*. Quantitative data reveals that participants most often employed SUSE when using a neutral (69.43%) or friendly (26.68%) tone. Participants did not ever use SUSE in a hostile tone and, in using a confrontational tone, only a few used SUSE markers (3.89%)⁴³.

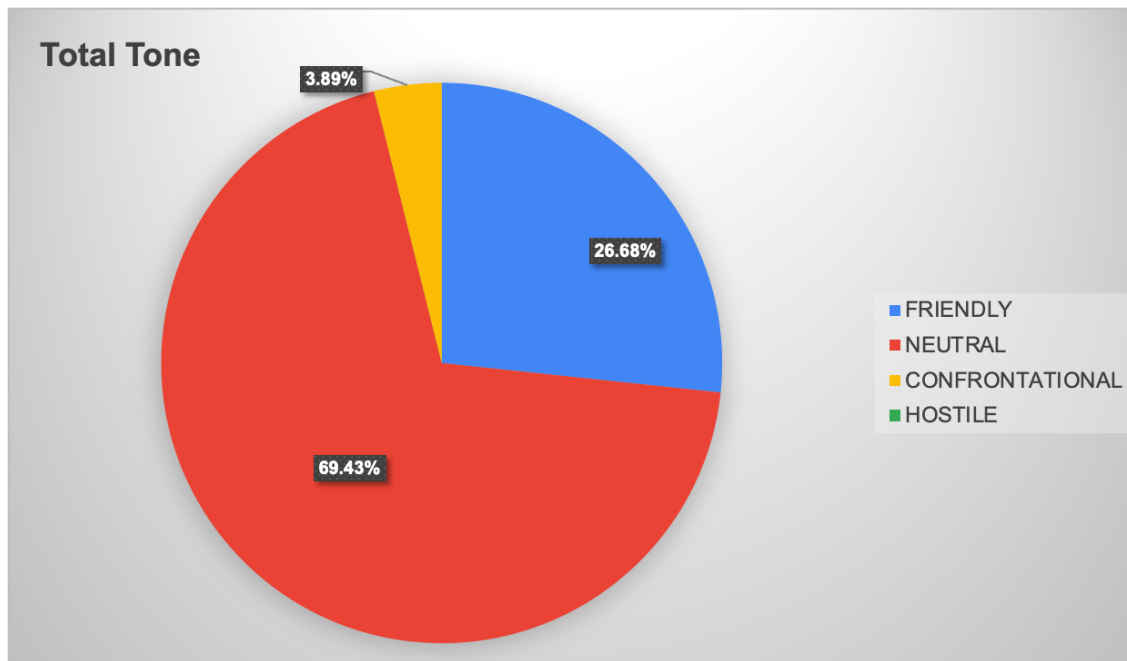
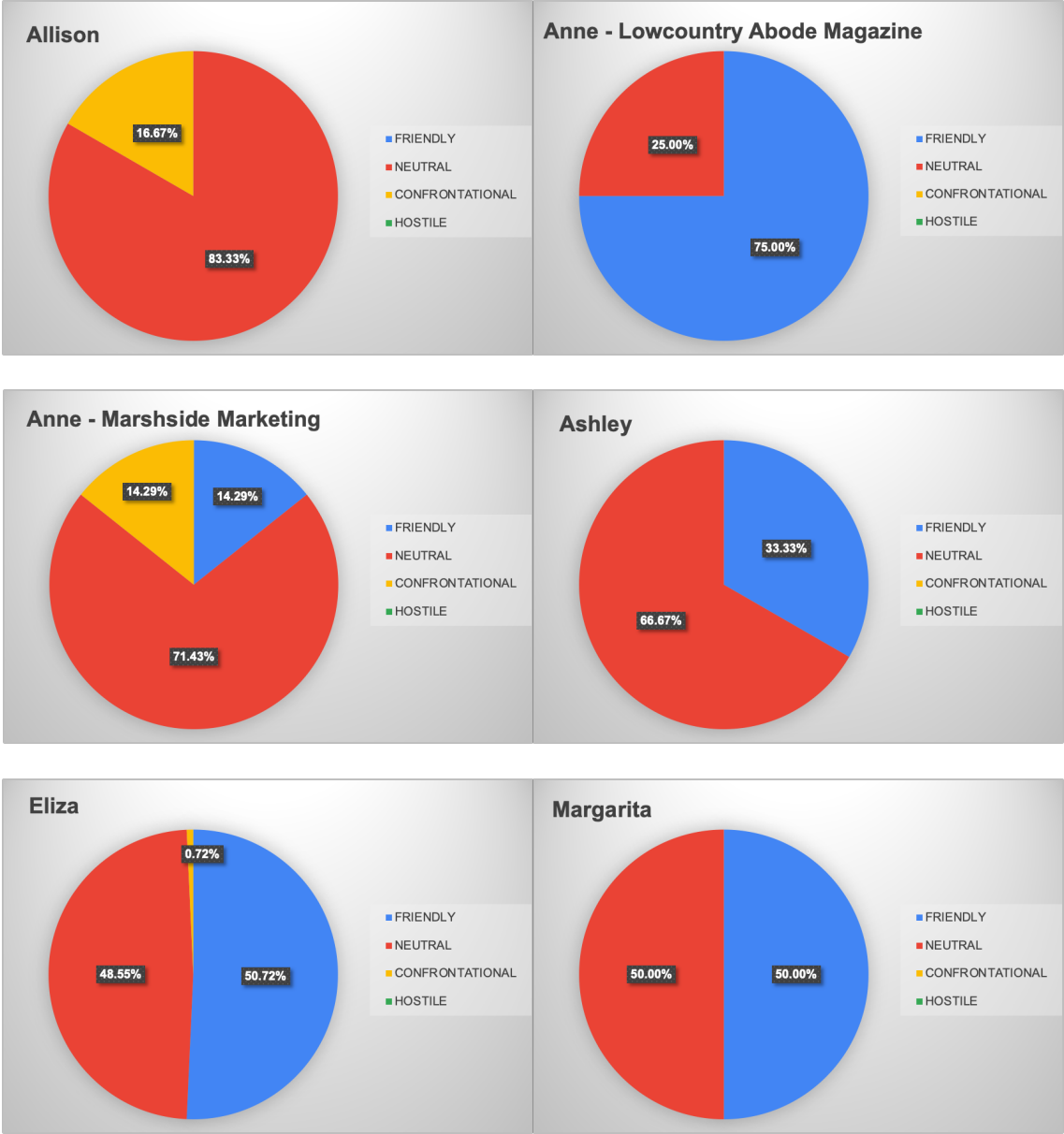


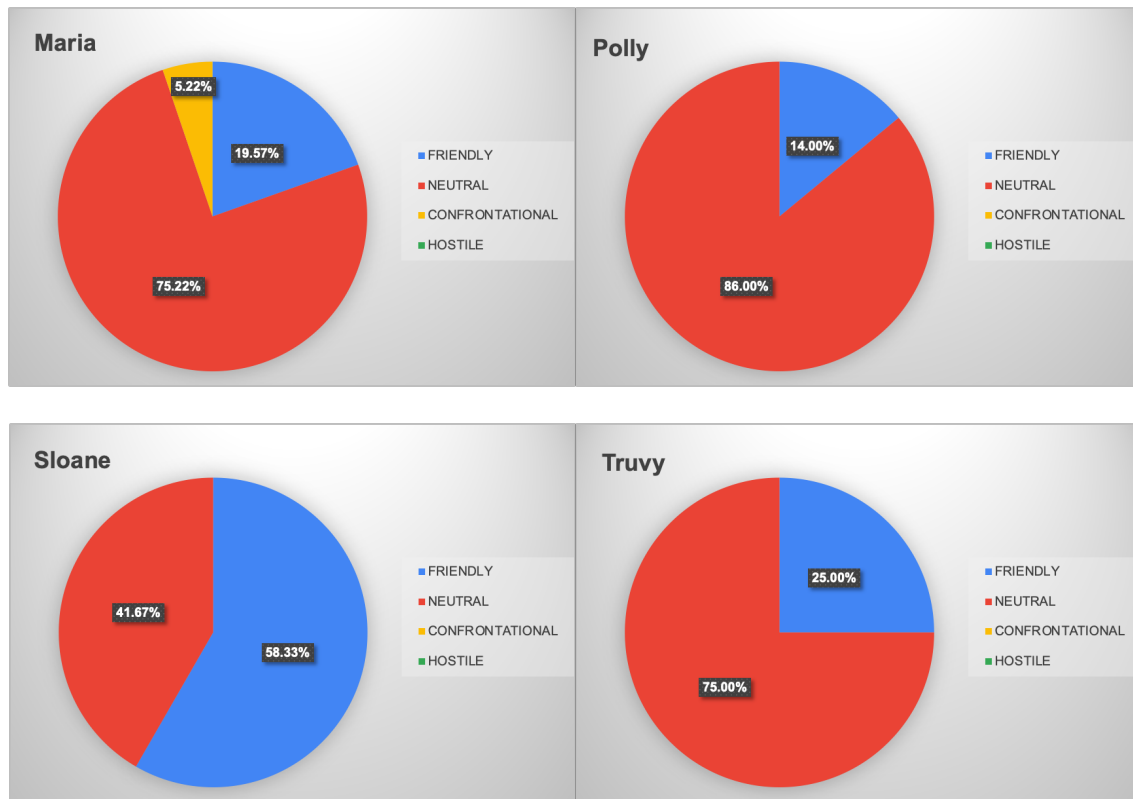
Figure 4.38: Total Tone. This chart demonstrates the overall tones used containing markers of SUSE.

When viewed by participant, the data is as follows and available in visual form on pages 143-144 through the use of pie charts. None of **Allison**'s emails were categorized as friendly or hostile; all were either neutral (83.33%) or confrontational (16.67%). None of **Anne**'s emails were categorized as hostile; all were either friendly, neutral, or confrontational. Of those SUSE emails sent from her *Lowcountry Abode* account, 75.00% were friendly in tone, while 25% were neutral. When communicating from her Marshside

⁴³ All percentages in this paragraph were extracted from 566 total emails (instead of the overall total of 683) because, while I knew the markers of Courtney's 117 emails, I did not know the audience, tone, or genre (see notes in Chapter 3 about HIPPA laws and Courtney's data).

Marketing account, Anne's tone in 14.29% of her SUSE-marked emails were friendly, whereas 71.43% were neutral and 14.29% were confrontational. All of **Ashley's** emails containing SUSE were categorized as friendly (33.33%) or neutral (66.67%); none were confrontational or hostile. None of **Eliza's** emails containing SUSE were categorized as hostile, but 50.73% were friendly, 48.55% were neutral, and 0.72% were confrontational. None of **Margarita's** emails containing SUSE were categorized as hostile or confrontational, but 50.00% were friendly, 50.00% were neutral. None of **Maria's** emails were categorized as hostile, but 19.57% were friendly, 75.22% were neutral, and 5.22% were confrontational. All of **Olivia's** SUSE-marked emails were categorized as neutral (100%). She used no emojis or multiple exclamation points to categorize any messages as friendly, and she did not have any confrontational or hostile communications. All of **Polly's** SUSE-marked emails were categorized as neutral (86.00%) or friendly (14.00%). None of her emails with SUSE markers were considered to be confrontational or hostile. All of **Shelby's** SUSE-marked emails were categorized as neutral (100%). She used no emojis or multiple exclamation points to categorize any messages as friendly, and she did not have any confrontational or hostile communications containing markers of SUSE. All of **Sloane's** SUSE-marked emails were categorized as neutral (41.67%) or friendly (58.33%). She had no emails containing SUSE that were confrontational or hostile. And all of **Truvy's** SUSE-marked emails were categorized as neutral (75.00%) or friendly (25.00%). She had no emails containing SUSE that were confrontational or hostile, likely because the owner would be more apt to handle such situations either over the phone or in person.





Figures 4.39-48: Tone Charts for All Participants. These graphs demonstrate participants' tones for emails that contain SUSE markers. No chart is included for Courtney due to the nature of her data and her concern for violating HIPAA violations, and no chart exists for Olivia or Shelby because they were all (100%) categorized as neutral.

Making Sense of the Numbers with Qualitative Data

While the data presented here demonstrate that there are vast differences and recurring trends in the use of SUSE in day-to-day communications in the field of marketing, these numbers make the most sense when paired with qualitative data and a peek at the actual email communications. In the next chapter, I present several sample emails, analyzed using a combination of genre and discourse analysis, to demonstrate how these professionals use SUSE. The email contents pair with interview data about how and why the writers implemented SUSE during a particular communicative event. This insight about *how* and *why* sheds light on the interdiscursive implications of using

SUSE in the workplace and points to a gap in education that does not address the flexibility of language in professional communications.

CHAPTER 5: QUALITATIVE RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative data reveal the most nuanced picture of SUSE in use, in context, when studied in tandem with qualitative results. While we may be able to draw significant insights from the quantitative data, those insights are incomplete without a deeper dive into the lived experiences of the writers as they composed the messages under scrutiny. Specifically, the qualitative data offer a glimpse of the interdiscursive nature of these communications, as they reveal how an extra-workplace discourse community accepting of SUSE merges with the accepted discourse of each organization. The following five sections—Hybridity, Interdiscursivity, Exigencies, Invention, and Intervention—provide supporting qualitative evidence for the quantitative data presented in Chapter 4 and offer six broad takeaways, categorized under Exigence and Invention, gleaned from this evidence.

Hybridity, or Qualitative Genre Analysis and Discourse Analysis

In Chapter 3, I offered a methodology based in both Spinuzzi and Bhatia that indicates (1) conversations marked by SUSE should be studied using both genre analysis and discourse analysis, (2) communications in the workplace are interdiscursive (that is, they blend discourse communities within genres), and (3) that interdiscursivity is a rhetorical move. I further indicate that because SUSE is often reserved for those discourse communities and genres outside of the workplace, the insertion of a marker of SUSE in these genres would be considered a move away from conventions, demonstrating a writer's "flexibility" (Bhatia *Critical* 9). Understanding this perception

of SUSE (or any regional dialect) within a communicative moment requires examples. For this section, I have randomly selected⁴⁴ three email communications to perform a hybrid version of genre and discourse analysis.

Each message may be evaluated using both discourse analysis and genre analysis. In Chapter 3, I offer a foundational explanation of discourse analysis that provides Barbara Johnstone's heuristic of the method, which states:

Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world; Discourse is shaped by people's purposes, and discourse shapes possible purposes; Discourse is shaped by linguistic structure, and discourse shapes linguistic structure; Discourse is shaped by participants, and discourse shapes participants; Discourse is shaped by prior discourse, and discourse shapes the possibilities for future discourse; Discourse is shaped by its media, and it shapes the possibilities of its media. (*Discourse* 8)

Furthermore, Bhatia offers a "multiperspective model" of genre analysis appropriate for workplace communications to analyze communicative purpose, discursive space, nature of content, participants, medium, and style (*Critical* 61, 69-70). From these two heuristics, I offer the following Question-and-Answer table that assists with analysis of email artifacts specifically for the purpose of understanding SUSE in use. In the sample

⁴⁴ To randomly select emails for this analysis section, I used Google's "Random Number Generator." I entered the numbers 1-566 (the total number of email artifacts) to generate three numbers. These random numbers coincided with the email number in my coding Excel Spreadsheet. If a number was generated that corresponded to an email by the same author, I generated a replacement so that the samples demonstrated a breadth of writers. The numbers generated by Google's application were 409, 124, and 2.

below, I have left the “Answer” column blank, and it will be filled in reference to the following three email sample analyses.

Table 5.1: Blank Question-and-Answer Heuristic

Question	Answer
What is the writer’s communicative purpose ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the writer’s purpose (or how does it shape the writer’s purpose)?	
What is the discursive space ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the world (or shapes the world)?	
What is the nature of the content ? Or how is this discourse shaped by prior discourse (or how does it shape future discourse)?	
Who are the participants ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the participants (or how does it shape participants)?	
What is the medium ? Or how is this discourse shaped by media (or how does it shape media)?	
What is the style ? Or, how is this discourse shaped by linguistic structure (or how does it shape linguistic structure)?	

This chart is helpful in combining both discourse analysis and genre analysis to understand how a communicative moment works within a given context, and I will use it for each of the three randomly selected examples below. Specifically, this chart helps to correlate how participants use SUSE with how they perceive the language and its appropriate use.

Email Sample Analysis 1

On Tuesday, July 10, 2018, Maria sent the following message to a client, Aaron, the manager responsible for the advertising initiatives of Cook Automotive⁴⁵. She writes, “[Aaron] - I had to pull the offers from Saturday’s ad for the [Local News Outlet] ad for this week. They couldn’t **wait on us** anymore to go to print, so we sent them the attached ad with the Saturday offers. Thanks, Maria” According to Maria, this short message is connected to a long string of calls and messages to the client to gather information for the week’s new and used car pricing deals to print in an advertisement, but this message in itself is not part of a longer email thread. Maria generated it as a new message to update the client about the status of a current project. The marker of SUSE, *wait on* (as opposed to *waiting for*), has been identified in bold.

If readers recall from the “Participants” section of Chapter 3, Maria is an Account and Project Manager at Velocity Marketing, the same agency at which Ashley is the Agency Principal and Eliza is the Public Relations Director. Maria has been working at Velocity Marketing for two-and-a-half years and has a total of sixteen years of overall experience in marketing. Velocity Marketing is a mid-sized marketing firm with approximately fifteen employees that serves a national client base in six markets outside of the Southern states: Buffalo, New York; Chicago, Illinois; Houston, TX; St. Louis, Missouri; Palm Spring, CA; and Rancho Mirage, CA. These markets are accompanied by 18 markets served in the Southern states. The scope of clients is vast, including retail clients (such as South Carolina Gear with store locations in five Southern states and GiGi’s Luxury Boutique in Charleston, SC), automotive clients (from luxury Porsche and

⁴⁵ Client names have been changed to protect the anonymity of participants.

Rolls-Royce dealerships to quality domestic dealerships for Chevrolet and GMC), and healthcare providers (laser eye care and cosmetic procedures). Communications range from internal messages and conversations with local and national clients to emails sent to contacts from automotive manufacturers in Europe. Specifically, Maria works with automotive clients, and their offices are spread throughout the United States, offering her the opportunity to communicate via email with clients and vendors from coast-to-coast.

Within this context, Maria's email may be described by answering the following questions in the Question-and-Answer heuristic chart.

Table 5.2: Email Sample 1 Question-and-Answer Heuristic

Question	Answer
What is the writer's communicative purpose ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the writer's purpose (or how does it shape the writer's purpose)?	Maria's communicative purpose is to inform, and this email has been categorized in the genre of "informative." Specifically, she seeks to deliver negative news: She did not hear from the client, Aaron, in time to carry out a new advertisement for the week. However, she cushions this news with the fact that she thought creatively, using the content from the week before to ensure that Cook Automotive had a presence in the upcoming publication.
What is the discursive space ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the world (or shapes the world)?	Velocity Marketing is a team-oriented, woman-led business that strives to provide clients with the best service possible, maintaining (for the most part) positive relationships with all clients and vendors. The workplace environment is often stressful and fast-paced, but overall supportive of each team member in their endeavors to provide for their clients. This atmosphere allows Maria to deliver negative news to a client without fear

	<p>of internal repercussions. Her boss trusts her to deliver negative news to the client and to offer a solution to the problem.</p>
<p>What is the nature of the content? Or how is this discourse shaped by prior discourse (or how does it shape future discourse)?</p>	<p>Despite mostly positive relationships with clients, this one with Aaron is rocky. In the summer of 2018, the relationship between Velocity Marketing and Cook Automotive began to dissolve, and the working relationship was tense. This email communication exists during the height of this tension, where Maria would have wanted to be both firm in her indication that this missed deadline was not the fault of the agency <i>and</i> not accusatory of the client. This is most clearly indicated in her use of <i>us</i> following <i>wait on</i>. The publication, in this case, was not waiting on the agency, but on the client to provide the necessary information. Despite this, Maria shares the responsibility with the client.</p>
<p>Who are the participants? Or how is this discourse shaped by the participants (or how does it shape participants)?</p>	<p>Maria is African American, is from the South, and has a positive view of SUSE, using it in many of her conversations with all audiences no matter their geographic location or position. Aaron is a client local to Charleston, South Carolina. His communications are almost always direct, to the point, and focused on work with very little phatic conversation. Responding in kind, Maria's communication here is succinct and to-the-point, absent of any niceties or unnecessary information. At the time of sending this message, Maria had had a long relationship with Aaron, even years before she began working at Velocity Marketing.</p>

What is the medium ? Or how is this discourse shaped by media (or how does it shape media)?	The medium here is email, which necessitates a certain format for the genre, typically inclusive of a subject line, an address, the body of the message, and a sign-off with a signature. Maria's email includes all of these details, including an automatically included signature (not copied in the email text above).
What is the style ? Or how is this discourse shaped by linguistic structure (or how does it shape linguistic structure)?	The linguistic structure is short and succinct to match the working style of Aaron. Specifically, though, it contains a marker of SUSE, which is common for Maria's own linguistic form. She explained, "[Using SUSE is] the norm, so it's just normal to me."

In this description, the contextual information about the discourse and the genre shapes Maria's use of SUSE. Because she sees SUSE use as the "norm," she did not seem to make an intentional choice to insert it here. However, the context of the message fits with her perception of the language use and its appropriateness. Maria explains, "In initial communications, where I'm just meeting a client or just getting to know a client, I would use strictly professional words until I felt comfortable enough to use those Southernisms. But with all of my Southern clients, there's no one I definitely wouldn't, because even if a *y'all* were to slip out, all of my clients pretty much know I'm from the South." In this scenario, Aaron is a Southern client that Maria has had a longstanding relationship with; the communication fits within Maria's parameters of using SUSE.

From the quantitative data in Chapter 4, one can see that Maria's SUSE use most often occurs in her communications with clients, when making a request or providing information, while speaking in a neutral tone. She also most frequently uses *you all* and *waiting on* as markers of her SUSE. This randomized email sample provides a typical

example of her SUSE use, as it is an informative email written to a client using *waiting on*. However, it represents an atypical situation in which her tone is confrontational instead of neutral.

Email Sample Analysis 2

On Friday, October 26, 2018, Sloane participated in the following conversation with her boss, Kurt, responding to a request for a meeting. Kurt writes, “Are you available to do an introductory call at 10am today?” Sloane responds, “Good Morning! **Yes sir.** I’m available.” According to Sloane, it was rare for her to receive this message via email, as in most cases, she communicates with her internal team via Slack. However, it makes sense for Kurt to use this medium in this particular scenario because of the urgency of the message. He sent his meeting request at 8:45am, before business hours, for a meeting just an hour and fifteen minutes later. While Sloane may not have been logged on to Slack that early in the morning, she does receive her email messages immediately and at all hours on her phone. In this message, the marker of SUSE, *yes sir*, has been identified with a bold font.

If readers recall from the “Participants” section of Chapter 3, Sloane is a Social Media Community Manager at Keane Lee Marketing, a small yet national micro-firm based in Charleston, South Carolina. Keane Lee Marketing is best known for their representation of Southern Soda Brand, a popular cult-following soda with roots in the American South. Sloane is one of just a few team members, but she works closely with the executive team at Southern Soda Brand. Although this is the company’s primary client, it does have several smaller businesses on their roster, all based in Southern states. Sloane’s daily activities include developing social media campaigns (paid and organic),

implementing those campaigns, and generating data that demonstrates the success of the company's social media marketing efforts. All of her communications occur with those residing and working in the Southern United States.

Within this context, Sloane's email may be described by answering the following questions in the Question-and-Answer heuristic chart.

Table 5.3: Email Sample 2 Question-and-Answer Heuristic

Question	Answer
What is the writer's communicative purpose ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the writer's purpose (or how does it shape the writer's purpose)?	Sloane's communicative purpose in this exchange is to respond to a request from her boss, and this email has been categorized in the "response to a request" genre.
What is the discursive space ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the world (or shapes the world)?	Sloane's response has been shaped by the world in which she communicates; specifically, Keane Lee Marketing is a Southern company, working with Southern clients, run by Southern employees and owners. Not only does her use of SUSE represent the world in which she works, but it upholds the culture of the organization and perpetuates the Southern ethos of the company.
What is the nature of the content ? Or how is this discourse shaped by prior discourse (or how does it shape future discourse)?	Sloane's discourse and her use of SUSE is shaped by her experience with the language. In her interview, when asked about this email and why she chose to use <i>sir</i> in this instance, she stated, "I think it just reflects how I would talk to him. I'd just say <i>yes sir</i> , so that's what I wrote." This pattern of writing how one has spoken in the past allows for the discourse in this email communication to be shaped by prior discourse experiences with her boss.

<p>Who are the participants? Or how is this discourse shaped by the participants (or how does it shape participants)?</p>	<p>Sloane is Southern and regularly uses her Southern language in the context of her workplace. Kurt is the President and CEO of Keane Lee Marketing, and his relationship with Sloane is a positive one. They work together well to accomplish the goals of the agency for their clients. In this scenario, Kurt made a last-minute request of Sloane, one that could have been met with resistance or hostility. However, the message indicates instead their friendly, mutually respectful relationship demonstrated through Kurt's request posed as a question (rather than a demand) and through Sloane's response of <i>Good morning!</i> (with an exclamation point) and the use of <i>yes sir</i> (as she responded affirmatively with respect).</p>
<p>What is the medium? Or how is this discourse shaped by media (or how does it shape media)?</p>	<p>Sloane's response does not fit a typified email exchange, as this message was intended to be a quick response. It lacks both a sign-off and a signature, though it offers the needed information in the body of the text and a greeting of <i>Good morning!</i> This altered structure is shaped by the urgency of the email and the likelihood that it was sent from Sloane's phone.</p>
<p>What is the style? Or how is this discourse shaped by linguistic structure (or how does it shape linguistic structure)?</p>	<p>The style of this email is short and succinct, yet friendly. The linguistic structure indicates both respect and a willingness to be available for the needs of the company and client. The urgent nature of the message (as explained above in medium) shapes the linguistic choices.</p>

The context of Sloane's communication with Kurt lends understanding to how she uses SUSE in the workplace, and Sloane's perception of using SUSE is based on what she

calls “energy level.” In her interview, she stated, “I feel like if you try like to match someone's energy level and the way you speak or give off a certain Southern energy—it helps build relationships because you just got that in common.” When she hears another colleague using Southern speech, she noted that she perceives them as having a similar energy to herself: “I think we'd have a lot in common. They're like me, easy to get along with.” This association between SUSE and “easy to get along with” has perhaps fueled this particular response from Sloane to Kurt. Despite the inconvenience of his request, Sloane presents an easy-to-get-along-with energy level to demonstrate her commitment to the company and to comply with her boss's request.

This particular exchange, in some ways, is representative of Sloane's SUSE use. Sloane's quantitative data presented in Chapter 4 indicate that she only uses *you all*, *sir*, and *ma'am* as markers of her SUSE in written email communications, though *you all* is most common. Despite primarily communicating internally via Slack, 16% of her messages containing SUSE were sent to one of her two bosses (Kurt being one of them). In genre and tone, 25% were responses to requests (like this one) and more than 50% were friendly in tone (again, like this message). Overall, this randomly selected email exchange represents a fairly typical use of SUSE for Sloane.

Email Sample Analysis 3

On Wednesday, November 15, 2018, Polly contacted a community member, Kate, to facilitate an introduction between Kate, a cancer patient at Polly's work, and a local magazine, *Moxie*, interested in telling her story. Polly writes,

Hello [Kate],

It was great to meet you and for the opportunity to hear your story and how you are encouraging others. Everyone experiences trials and tribulations; however, it is how we stand under pain and sufferings that speaks to where our faith rests. God is good – All the time!

I believe by documenting the experiences of your cancer diagnosis and posting to U-tube [sic] is such a **blessing**. It is evident you desire to educate and also reassure others about the unknown and sometimes scary myths surrounding cancer treatment. During our initial conversation, we talked about you doing a testament on behalf of [First Care] and also in [*Moxie*] Magazine. Although it is not going to work out for [First Care], [*Moxie*] is interested in what you are doing and the way you are enlightening others about life during cancer treatment.

[*Moxie*] is a local news magazine with a large female readership covering Horry, Georgetown and Williamsburg counties from Georgetown to Southport to Conway. I believe a story about your experiences with cancer and your goal to encourage and educate others will be a great fit and opportunity to reach many. The magazine appreciates real life stories that encourage others and to me, yours is just that!!

Although I shared a little about your story and what you are doing, I did not reveal your name. If this is an opportunity you are interested in pursuing, [*Moxie*] is interested in assisting you share your experiences with cancer. Ms. [Brenda King] is awaiting your call as soon as possible to get started on your story. Of course there is no cost to you and this has no connection to [First Care]-

I simply believe what you are doing is good and want to help you inspire others.

When you call Ms. [Brenda], please drop my name only so she knows who you are and why you are calling her.

[*Moxie*] Magazine

Ms. [Brenda King]

Cell: [843-555-5555]

Office: [843-555-5555]

E-mail: [bking@xxxxxx.com]

Thank you again for your passion and compassion to help others!! **Bless** you,

[Polly]

While this email is part of an ongoing conversation between Polly and Kate, the email itself stands alone and is not part of a longer thread. It contains the subject line, “You Are Encouragement!!!” and contains a standardized signature for Polly. The SUSE markers *bless* and *blessing* are indicated by bolded font.

If readers recall from the “Participants” section of Chapter 3, Polly is a Physician Liaison with a healthcare facility, First Care. She does not work directly with patients; instead, she serves as the marketing connection between the facility, which provides radiation therapy to cancer patients, and local referring physicians and hospitals. Polly works at a specific First Care location in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina. The larger company, First Care, is a national medical organization with headquarters in Australia, China, and Spain. First Care recently acquired Polly’s office in 2020 from the previous owners, Fox Oncology, based in Florida. First Care has one to two physician liaisons in

each market, and Polly is the only one in the Myrtle Beach market. These physician liaisons make up part of the company's in-house marketing team.

Within this context, Polly's email may be described by answering the following questions in the Question-and-Answer heuristic chart.

Table 5.4: Email Sample 3 Question-and-Answer Heuristic

Question	Answer
What is the writer's communicative purpose ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the writer's purpose (or how does it shape the writer's purpose)?	Polly's communicative purpose in this email exchange is to make a request, and the email has been categorized in the request genre. Specifically, Polly is requesting that Kate contact Brenda at <i>Moxie</i> magazine to schedule an interview. As a sub-purpose, this email is also informative, giving Kate the information she needs to respond to this request effectively and knowledgeably.
What is the discursive space ? Or how is this discourse shaped by the world (or shapes the world)?	This discursive moment is shaped by the world in which Polly lives. She regularly works with cancer patients and survivors as she serves as the community "face" of the Myrtle Beach branch of First Care. Specifically, her use of the SUSE marker <i>bless</i> is shaped by the Protestant underpinnings of Southern culture that provide a religious influence on the language.
What is the nature of the content ? Or how is this discourse shaped by prior discourse (or how does it shape future discourse)?	Though this conversation is the only one in the specific email thread, it is based on previous conversations between Polly and Kate, specifically about the work Kate does to share her story as a cancer patient. Polly references directly an initial conversation with Kate. She writes: "During our initial conversation, we talked about you doing a testament on

	<p>behalf of [First Care] and also in [Moxie] Magazine. Although it is not going to work out for [First Care], [Moxie] is interested in what you are doing and the way you are enlightening others about life during cancer treatment.” This exchange and Kate’s willingness to tell her story influence Polly’s request for Kate to reach out to Moxie; Polly can make this request confidently knowing that Kate is already open to the idea.</p>
<p>Who are the participants? Or how is this discourse shaped by the participants (or how does it shape participants)?</p>	<p>Kate and Polly have a congenial working relationship, but it’s not ongoing, as there are no other conversations between Kate and Polly available in Polly’s email inbox. The two women have had little to no contact after this exchange. However, the women find connection not only from a mutual experience of undergoing cancer treatment (Polly is a breast cancer survivor as well), but with their mutual faith in a Christian God. Polly indicates that faith is significant to Kate when she writes, “Everyone experiences trials and tribulations; however, it is how we stand under pain and sufferings that speaks to where our faith rests. God is good – All the time!” This mutual understanding based in faith between the two women shapes Polly’s word choice in using the SUSE markers <i>bless</i> and <i>blessing</i>.</p>
<p>What is the medium? Or how is this discourse shaped by media (or how does it shape media)?</p>	<p>Polly’s exchange is a formal email. It includes a subject line, an introduction, a body, and a sign off with a standard, auto-inserted signature. More importantly, it has not been composed for brevity and reads more like a letter than a quick exchange (such as those in samples one and two written by Maria and</p>

	Sloane). The medium allows for this longer style message so that Polly's request may be explained in full with all the details required (or desired).
What is the style ? Or how is this discourse shaped by linguistic structure (or how does it shape linguistic structure)?	The style of Polly's message is akin to a long-form letter, allowing her to include all needed details and to provide much phatic conversation and praise of Kate, perhaps to influence her response to the request.

Speaking of the SUSE word *bless*, in particular, Polly indicates that she uses this term often when she's speaking to others who she knows shares her Christian religion. In her interview, she points to an email exchange with her pastor sent prior to the parameters of this study (in 2017) about a mission trip as an example and says, "I definitely use that when talking about mission trip stuff and with people from the church." This insight about the term applies similarly here; she finds a commonality with her recipient and because of that commonality, feels comfortable using these particular SUSE markers. However, the term *blessings* is also her standard salutation on her signature⁴⁶ to all emails (no matter the recipient or their religious affiliation):

Blessings,

[Polly], Physician Liaison

[First Care]

[1234 Main Street]

Myrtle Beach, South Carolina 29577

⁴⁶ In Polly's emails, I did not account for this use of *blessings* in her signature line in her quantitative data, as it would be in 100-percent of her emails and is not necessarily part of her conversation with the recipient.

Phone: [843-555-5555]

Mobile: [843-555-5555]

Many in the South see and use the term sarcastically, as in “Bless your heart.” The phrasing here indicates that the speaker feels some form of self-righteous pity on the recipient of the term. However, that’s not Polly’s intention with the word. She, instead, sees it as a marker of faith and a connector between herself and her audience. That is, she means it sincerely. Kate’s own story of faith offers Polly the opportunity to use this SUSE term in a way that would be accepted by her audience and appreciated.

This randomly sampled email does not necessarily reflect the most prevalent SUSE markers, audience, genre, or tone of Polly’s email data set. She much more frequently uses *ma’am/mam* and only rarely uses *bless* in her professional communications. Furthermore, most of her SUSE use occurs in email changes that are written to coworkers or colleagues as responses to requests (to which she often responds with *no mam* or *yes mam*), and 86% of her emails containing SUSE are neutral in tone, whereas this one is much more friendly. While this is not necessarily a representative example of Polly’s communication using SUSE, it does provide insight into how the genre and her discourse community shapes her use of SUSE.

Interdiscursivity, or a Blending of Discourses within Genres

If these communicative moments represent a writer’s discourse communities as they unfold within a genre, then multiple discourse communities may be at play within a specific written text. Bhatia indicates that such blending of genres is common and a marker of “expert members of professional communities” (*Critical* 58). He indicates that genres should account for “how expert professionals exploit generic resources to create

new and hybrid forms transcending professional, disciplinary, institutional, as well as cultural boundaries” (*Critical* 58). For Bhatia, individuals composing within genres cross boundaries to achieve their own “personal” and “professional” goals (*Critical* 59). Writers not only craft “hybrid” forms of genres, but they “bend generic norms and conventional to implicitly express their private intentions in contexts which otherwise do not allow such actions” (*Critical* 59). This last sentence is key: if writers may bend the rules of a genre to allow for private intentions, they may do so with their regional dialect. This bending and blending are markers of interdiscursivity in professional communications.

From the start, it is important to note that nearly all participants in this study drew a distinction between what they deemed to be “professional” communication and what they deemed to be more casual communication that readily allowed for the use of SUSE. For instance, Olivia says, “I try to be more professional, and I don’t use *y’all* or things like that...because it’s very casual and not professional.” Polly indicates that removing SUSE from her written communications “makes them a little more professional,” and Anne links “professional” language with “intellectual” language, from which she excludes much of SUSE’s lexicon. In each interview, participants juxtaposed professional communication against SUSE, as though each participant viewed the two as opposites and incompatible. Yet, many of their emails offer examples of the blending of these two discourse communities within a single email text.

In this section, I will demonstrate how participants’ communications offer examples of interdiscursive communicative moments, pulling discourse markers from one community (a private community that allows for the use of SUSE) and blending it

into workplace writing to reveal the writer’s “flexibility” (Bhatia *Critical* 9). The two examples in this section were selected for their appropriateness for illustrating this point, not randomly; each example points to an obvious blending of the two discourse communities. However, this blending is readily available in countless other examples from the collected email artifacts.

On Monday, November 4th, Eliza sent a formal request to a media representative, Caroline Crane, for coverage of a client’s grand opening event. As a brief reminder, Eliza is the Public Relations Director at Velocity Marketing, the same agency at which Ashley is the Agency Principal and Maria is an Account and Project Manager (full details are located in the “Participants” section of Chapter 3). The email contains the following content along with an attached, formal press release:

Hello there [Caroline],

I know we are going to cross paths sooner rather than later 😊 I’ve helped to put together a news release for [Beaucoup’s] Grand Opening this Friday, November 8. There will be a lot of giveaways, demos, music, champagne and more! It would be fantastic to get some Nexton love to share on social media channels, and if **you all** have a community board or email going out to your residents and area employees! (PS – LOVED the video **y’all** put together last month!) If you would like, I’m happy to send **you all** pictures of the grand opening event to share as well! Attached is a news release with info and opening specials that they are offering right now.

The email closes with Eliza’s professional, auto-inserted signature. So, how is this email content drawing from both a professional style of communication expected of a formal

email sharing a press release and also a style of communication incorporating SUSE? The nature of this email is professional: Eliza makes a request from a representative she has yet to meet in person, provides the needed information, and includes an attachment for a formal press release. However, she is also drawing from a more personal repertoire of language, one that incorporates a discourse community traditionally reserved for extra-professional communications. There are three instances of SUSE markers in this document: *you all*, *you all*, and *y'all*. They have been indicated in bold.

The language functions to assist Eliza in meeting both her professional and personal goals. Professionally, she needs to secure promotion and coverage of the event for her client, Beaucoup, to do her job well and represent the goals of the agency. Personally, she needs to forge a relationship with this media contact that will last for years to come, no matter what agency she works with in the future. To do this, she incorporates part of her identity through the use of SUSE to ensure this more personal goal. In her interview, Eliza noted, “PR is all about relationships, especially working with media. It can seem so robotic until you get to know a person, then those conversations can be more casual. You have to get to that point though in building those relationships.” For her personal growth within her career, Eliza focuses on building that more friendly relationship with media clients. The blending of these two goals not only allows for Eliza to craft a generic request email in a professional setting, but to bring in elements of another, more personal discourse community that readily allows for the use of SUSE. Bhatia would deem this encounter one of an “expert [member] of a professional community” that demonstrates linguistic “flexibility” in an interdiscursive way (*Critical* 58, 9).

In a second example, Olivia participated in a professional email conversation with a client, Laurel with Integrity Products, in July and August of 2020. As a reminder, Olivia is a Partner Brand Success Manager at a national food delivery company, Send It (for more details, see the “Participants” section of Chapter 3). This is one of only a few conversations Olivia has ever had with Laurel, and it specifically relates to updates on the company’s advertising with Send It. Each email communication from Olivia includes her professional signature (not repeated below), and this full conversation falls under the email subject line: “Status Call Follow Ups.” The conversation begins with Olivia writing to Laurel on July 8, 2020:

Hi [Laurel], I had [Connie] on our Finance team resend your March invoices.

Please let me know if you did not receive them. Attached is our Overview and Capabilities deck for your reference when thinking through H2 planning. I should have the Line Sale Report in day this week and will send it over as soon as possible. We are slightly behind due to COVID.

In addition, below is a list of H2 Tentpoles that you may want to consider:

- Classroom Essentials (8/4-8/17) *alcohol wipes/hand sanitizer
- College Care Package (9/15-9/28) *alcohol wipes/hand sanitizer/shampoo/detergent
- Cold & Flu (11/17-11/30) *alcohol wipes/hand sanitizer

For diapers, a Solo Feature Promotion or Feature Cards maybe what we want to consider and possibly running a Digital Endcap for awareness in that category.

Let me know if you have any questions or if you want to jump on a call soon to discuss each tactic. Thank you!

Olivia begins here with a fairly formal email, pitching several advertising ideas to the client. This is straightforward and written primarily in a professional tone. Laurel responds on July 14th, 2020 saying:

Hi [Olivia],

Thank you for this! For the Homepage Marquee and Featured Cards - do these need to be promotional or can they be awareness-based i.e. for the launch of one of our new products? I'd be interested to learn more about these as well as the Dedicated Email and Digital Endcap. Can you please share pricing on these placements for our team to explore further?

Thanks!

[Laurel]

Olivia responds to Laurel's request with yet another formal, professional email providing the pricing, and the conversation continues in a professional manner until Olivia forgets to respond to a message. On August 4th, Laurel writes:

Hi [Olivia],

I think the Digital Endcap sounds like a good option for us but curious how it will work from the consumer standpoint if the product we're featuring is only available in a specific retailer. Will the "endcap" automatically take them to that retailer or would it only appear when they're browsing on that retailer's page?

She follows up three days later on August 7th saying:

Hi [Olivia],

Following up here! Please let me know about the above as well as what assets you will need to get our Digital Endcap set up and I can get started.

It is at this point that Olivia begins to veer from a strictly professional tone to one that incorporates her SUSE. On August 10th, she writes in response to Laurel's August 7th email, answering Laurel's question and ending with a question of her own:

Hi [Laurel], Sorry for the delay here. Great question...Can you remind me what your fiscal year is and if you have started the planning process for 2021? If you would like, we can go ahead and put together a plan for **you all**. And if you have a budget in mind, please let me know. Thank you!

After a few more back-and-forth communications about the details, Olivia provides a timeline for this promotion on August 13th. She writes:

Hi [Laurel], Yes, that works for me! I'll send an invite in the morning. I'll also talk to the team to see what we could get up in that short timeframe. We usually require a four week lead time for feature cards but we **may could** get a campaign up as soon as tomorrow.

This overall professional communicative moment, in which Olivia is relying on Laurel for an advertising sale and striving to please a client, begins formally, strictly in a professional tone and in a professional genre, offering a proposal for a new advertising campaign. However, as the conversation progresses, Olivia needs to repair the faux pas of her late response and continue the relationship; it is at this point that SUSE begins to enter her conversation. In her interview, she explained, "I think once you've established relationships and rapport with partners and clients, then I think it's okay for a little more of your personality to definitely shine through as they get to know you." Olivia allows

this “personality” to shine through via her use of the SUSE terms *you all* and *may could*. Both of these terms work to bring an element of an outside discourse community into her professional communications with a client. As in the case of Eliza’s email above, Olivia demonstrates the interdiscursive nature of generic conversation by “bend[ing] generic norms and conventions to implicitly express their private intentions in contexts which otherwise do not allow such actions” (Bhatia, *Critical* 59). Eliza’s private intentions include a desire to maintain the relationship and to allow her own personality to “shine” through her language use in a way that (she hopes) builds some reparative rapport with the client.

Through the five examples in these last two sections, one can see how discourse communities and genres are inextricable from each other and rely on each other for their formation. The participants in this study continually demonstrate the interdiscursive nature of their professional communications as they bring in SUSE discourse to accomplish the goals of each email exchange. These examples offer deep insights into specific communicative moments, but what can they tell us about SUSE in email communications overall, especially in terms of rhetorical action? In the methodology presented in Chapter 3, incorporating Spinuzzi adds a rhetorical significance to this data and SUSE use as it appears within workplace genres. To reiterate, Spinuzzi writes “rhetorical skills are needed” in a networked environment, and thereby needed in the creation and dissemination of genres, which “hold the network together” (*Network* 194, 17). These rhetorical skills necessary for generic communication that incorporates SUSE can be categorized as (1) exigencies and (2) invention strategies.

The next section broadens the scope of this analysis, offering six insights about how and why marketers use SUSE rhetorically in their emails through a combination of interview data, email samples, and quantitative results (presented in Chapter 4). The first three insights are categorized as the exigencies for SUSE use, or the conditions that make SUSE use a possible and sound rhetorical choice. The final three insights are categorized as invention, or the rhetorical moves facilitated by SUSE use.

Exigencies, or the Conditions of Possibility for SUSE Use

The combination of quantitative data, email artifact contents, and interview responses yields three exigences for the use of SUSE, or three conditions, when met, that influence the use or restraint of SUSE in written business communications. First, all participants have experienced some corrective instance in the past that either reprimanded or specifically identified the participants' SUSE use as incorrect or inappropriate. Second, SUSE for participants is tied to participants' confidence in their identity as Southern professionals, which is built over time and with experience and based in their perceived connection between SUSE and intelligence. Third, despite participants' inclination to reflect upon their SUSE use as limited to audiences within the South and (for the most part) within their same level of experience (or lower), data suggests that the audience's geographic location and rank within a company is less significant in the participant's propensity to use SUSE than the participant's personal relationship to the audience member. These three elements—past experience, confidence in their identity as a Southern professional, and the relationship to the audience—are the prime factors that determine whether or not, in a particular rhetorical situation, a writer will implement SUSE.

Influence of Their Past Experiences

During my interviews with participants, I asked each of them to recall an experience where their SUSE use was reprimanded, called out, or identified. All 12 participants had an affirmative response to this question, whether they remembered their grandmother teaching them how to properly say *Louisville* (in Ashley's case) or their parents constantly reminding them to say *ma'am* and *sir* to their elders (in Maria's and Sloane's cases). Or, in Margarita's case (whose first language is Spanish), her experience understanding her SUSE use came from a single family exchange unrelated to her upbringing. She recalled:

I've been living in South Carolina for so long that I don't even think of myself as a speaker of a certain kind of English. But I notice it when I see family. I have a cousin in Las Vegas, and I remember once she said, "You sound like a white girl instead of a Mexican." And I said, "A white girl? What does that mean." And I guess it was, you know, my inflection, and even saying stuff like *y'all* instead of *you all*, which is what I hear my aunts in California say when they speak in English. They'll say *you all* instead of *y'all*, and just that connection alone, I'm like, "Oh, I guess I do speak more Southern than I thought."

For Margarita and others, the learning experience and identification of SUSE in their speech was not necessarily a negative or embarrassing experience and often occurred in a family context. However, several participants link this learning moment directly to a workplace experience, one in which their SUSE use was called into question in various ways. These experiences that occurred within the workplace have a direct impact on participants' SUSE use in their written communications.

For Allison, her first high-pressure meeting out of college shaped her understanding of how she should speak and comport herself in her business settings. She explained:

Specifically, one event comes to mind—my first meeting with the buyers of [RA Goods]. They're all in their late 40s early 50s, and they're very Boston women. We had done a presentation for something, and I was like my sweet bubbly cute little young Southern self, and they told my boss, "Her work is really great, but we think she's green. We're a little nervous about her being the sole designer for our account and being able to handle the pressure of that." My boss vouched for me, and sure enough, like a month later, a situation came up that was super high pressure for their account, and I handled it very gracefully. The [RA Goods] manager messaged my boss and apologized for calling me green and said that she no longer had any doubts of me being able to handle the account. But I've kept this in my mind moving forward.

This specific event, and the stress and embarrassment it caused, led Allison to more consciously edit how she speaks and writes, especially for clients. This is evident in her email audience data, in which, of all emails sent containing SUSE, only 4.76% of those emails had client audiences. For Allison, her SUSE use is connected with her perception as youthful or inexperienced, what the buyers at RA Goods explained as "green." Allison continued to say:

I already come off so young and so innocent that if I say something like *y'all* to certain people, I think they're gonna look at me up and down like, "Honey, go ahead back down South. You don't belong up here." So when it comes to a more

serious situation, when I feel like I need to make up for the fact that I am young...when I have to make up for the fact that I *look* even younger than I am...I think saying things like *y'all* hurts me and makes me look more innocent...I just think for someone like me, I kind of get put in a box based off the way I look, so I tend to choose not to further put myself in that box.

This negative past experience led Allison to edit more closely her SUSE use in her communications, but it doesn't necessarily mean it was completely absent from her workplace exchanges. Nine percent of her total sent messages contained a marker of SUSE, and most of those exchanges occurred with vendors, equal-level coworkers, or her boss (who Allison is friends with outside of the workplace environment). As an early-career professional, when it is necessary for her to make an impression of being competent and experienced, Allison refrains from using SUSE.

Shelby, too, had a similar encounter as Allison early in her early career that has shaped how she uses SUSE in her written communications. Instead of linking this language use to inexperience, though, she links her hesitation to geographic location, using SUSE only when she knows the recipient will understand and appreciate the language. She explained:

When I was working in lighting sales, my first job, there was a client from up north. She had come into the showroom, and I met with her and communicated back-and-forth to see when her lights were going to come in. We always had issues with stuff being on backorder, so I was giving her an update on shipping. She was annoyed that something wasn't going to be there when she wanted it. I remember writing something like: "I apologize, but unfortunately, y'all are going

to have to wait a little bit longer.” I think she was just looking for something to be pissy about, but she emailed me back and said, “You know, that is very unprofessional to say *y’all*, and if I knew that this light was going to take that long, I wouldn’t have ordered it.” That was the first time that it was said to me, about my language. A little later in my career, I was working at *Lowcountry Abode* magazine, and another client, again someone from the North, said something about it being unprofessional to use *y’all* in an email. At that point, I was like, “Okay, well clearly people who are above the Mason-Dixon Line do not appreciate my Southernisms in email, so I guess I’m not gonna use them anymore unless I know for sure that the person is from around here.” So that’s kind of what I’ve done.

This experience from the past shaped Shelby’s current idea about when it’s appropriate to use SUSE, even nearly a decade removed from these experiences. While she uses SUSE in everyday speech, her writing is different. She said further, “I write pretty formally because I feel like some of it [SUSE] is slangish. You’re always taught in a formal written letter or email you’re not supposed to use those kinds of things. Because I’ve had past experiences of people being offended or saying that it’s not professional, I have shied away from using it unless I *know* that I’m communicating with someone who is from here or from the South.” This perception is evident in her email exchanges, in which only .17% of all sent emails contained any search-for markers of SUSE, and all emails containing search terms were sent to audiences residing in the Southern United States.

Other participants have had similar experiences, but with time, they have grown out of censoring themselves based on the experience. Ashley, for instance, remembers a

time when she was younger and clients in Chicago would poke fun at her Southern drawl. She recalled a moment in her career from the 1990s when she was first getting started in marketing: “I actually had clients from Chicago that used to make fun of me. People there would make fun of my accent, and it caused me to kind of lose my accent for a while.” Similarly, early in her career, Courtney became most acutely aware of her SUSE use when working with clients outside of the American South. She remembers, “At one point in my career, I traveled all over the United States with sales, and a lot of the physicians that I would be working with thought that it [my SUSE] was so cute. But others did not. There’s a fear that we [Southerners] may come across as dumb rednecks, so that has caused me to stop and think in some cases about what I’m saying because I don’t want to come across as an ignorant Southern woman. This idea began to develop in my mind when I was doing all that traveling that was career related, but I honestly don’t think about that much anymore.” Despite these experiences, though, both women have, with time, come to concentrate less on editing out their SUSE in their professional communications. Ashley, for instance, mentioned that when she moved back to the South from Chicago that her SUSE “came right back” and that she now uses it all the time, even with her current clients in Chicago. Courtney, too, has learned to embrace her SUSE use and considers it to be part of her identity and who she is; in fact, Courtney has the highest percentage of SUSE use in her email exchanges of any participant, with 11.41% of her total sent emails containing markers of SUSE.

The past experiences of the women, and how they responded to these experiences, have shaped their propensity to use SUSE. That is, they have created the conditions of possibility (or impossibility) for the language use either compelling the rhetor to insert a

marker of SUSE or causing the rhetor to pause and edit it out of their documents. This exigence, though, works in tandem with other conditions of the rhetorical situation that make SUSE use likely or not.

Confidence in Their Identity as a Southern Professional

Whether a transformative past experience has occurred or not, participants' likelihood of using SUSE in their email communications increases if they view the language as part of their professional identity. Alternatively, when participants viewed SUSE as antithetical to the professional identity they wish to project, they more frequently limit their use of SUSE. Returning to Courtney's experience recounted above, despite understanding that some may view SUSE use as an indicator of a "dumb redneck" identity, she cannot separate the language from who she is as an individual and as a professional. She explained, "I feel like I'm so comfortable at this point in my career with [a] 'this is who I am' [mentality] that unless it is a higher level or more serious level of communication—like between me and the CEO of [Cloud 9 Healthcare]—then I'm probably going to be myself in most cases. This [SUSE] is part of who I am. I think most times when you first meet me, what you see is what you get. I think that's good. It's a good way to be." For Courtney, SUSE is so deeply entwined with her identity that it's impossible to separate them. With time and experience within her career, she grew to embrace that identity, inclusive of her SUSE.

Other participants expressed a similar sentiment, revealing a confidence in having SUSE as part of their professional selves. Truvy, for instance, said succinctly, "I just talk and write how I normally would. If someone doesn't like it, I just say, 'I am who I am.'" Or, Eliza noted, "In the beginning of my career, I was incredibly professional in my

speech and writing, but then it wasn't until later in my career, maybe in the last five years, I realized that people kind of want to get to know me for who I am. So I decided I was going to make a transition and just be myself. I almost make a point to authentically be myself as often as possible in business, and I think that's why all those [Southern] words and phrases come out." This act of being authentically herself included her use of SUSE, and both Truvy and Eliza's sentiments reflect a trend in the quantitative data: those participants with more experience in their fields are more likely to use SUSE with confidence. With the exception of Allison, those with the highest percentages of SUSE use had at least nine years of experience in marketing. For instance, Courtney, Eliza, and Maria each consider themselves to be experienced professionals, and each had a higher percentage (over 3%) of SUSE use in their email communications.

In contrast, Anne understands SUSE to be antithetical to her professional identity because much of it is grammatically incorrect, a faux pas that she associates with lack of intelligence. Anne explains, "I think there are a lot of Southern-isms that are or are construed as grammatically incorrect, so a lot of times I steer away from them. I don't like to be perceived as not intelligent. I always reread my emails before I send them to make sure that there are no misspellings or bad grammar or anything because I don't like it when people see that I have written a poorly phrased email." For Anne, this editing out of grammatically incorrect choices leads to the editing out of many SUSE markers. Anne does make allowances for one term, *y'all*, because she deems it to be grammatically correct. She says, "*Y'all* is a contraction, and it's not grammatically incorrect. But like *ain't* is really Southern, and a lot of people use it poorly and grammatically incorrectly, so I don't use it. *Might could* is definitely something my dad says, and ew! I wouldn't use it.

It doesn't make any sense, and it's not grammatically correct." Because Anne's professional identity in writing rests on a perception of grammatical correctness, she categorizes many SUSE phrasings as antithetical to the identity she wishes to project. This limits the terms she uses in her professional emails to *ma'am*, *y'all*, *you all*, and *blinds*; each of these terms can be written in ways that align with standardized grammatical conventions. In her emails sent from her Marshside Marketing account, the only SUSE marker present was *y'all*, which she deems to be a grammatically correct SUSE marker. Associating grammar with identity and intelligence places certain parameters around what SUSE markers Anne allows herself to use in her professional communications.

This linking of SUSE with identity also seems to be tied to participants' education levels and their perception of SUSE in conjunction with mental aptitude. In general, the lower the level of education, the less SUSE present in the writers' emails. Three participants did not attend college for an undergraduate degree: Polly, Truvy, and Shelby. These participants had some of the lowest percentages of SUSE use: Polly (1.39%), Truvy (0.97%), and Shelby (0.17%). Whether consciously or not, and despite what they think about using SUSE, it seems as though the use of SUSE undermines the confidence these women have in their professional identities because they do not have a foundation of higher education as a demonstrator of their intellectual abilities; their language, absent of SUSE use, becomes a marker of their intellect (instead of a degree attached to their resume). In support of this interpretation, Polly explained:

There are probably Southern phrases I use, but I don't intentionally. I don't think it's appropriate—strongly do not—to use them at work. To me, in the Deep

South, the words that are used tend to be of those who are not well educated. I think I've always hated it [when others would use SUSE], and I think it always stood out in my mind as not the right or the proper way to speak if you *were* educated. I always want to correct people so badly, but then I remind myself to be more accepting.

Polly connects SUSE with incorrect or uneducated speech, a quality that she does not want associated with her professional identity. This causes her to avoid using SUSE in her emails, and multiple times during our search through her email documents, Polly expressed embarrassment at using certain phrases that she did not realize were part of Southern speech.

Even among college-educated participants, those who identified a link between intelligence and SUSE use were less likely to use SUSE in their email communications. Sloane, for instance, whose SUSE only appeared in 0.43% of her outgoing messages, connects SUSE use with “slang.” She said, “If I’m trying to explain or defend an idea or reason I want to do something the way I want to do it to my client, I probably would be much more professional in tone because I think it makes me sound smarter so that they’ll let me do it. When I’m just answering phone calls and in life, I would use it [SUSE]. But it’s slightly different when you’re trying to back up an idea or something like that. When I’m trying to back up an idea, I want to sound educated. Not that Southern dialect isn’t educated, but I feel like people think it’s like you’re not as educated—like it’s slang.” Sloane is hyper aware that SUSE may appear to be an uneducated way of speaking and writing; this awareness and link between the two reduces her likelihood of using the language.

This awareness of the perception is not unfounded in modern culture. Even those who use SUSE may find themselves apt to judge others who speak with more of a drawl than they do. Ashley, for instance, is the agency principal at Velocity Marketing, and in our interview, she confessed her own propensity to judge based on language. She explained, “I did have one employee, and she talked kind of slow with a long drawl—more of an accent than others. It was kind of interesting, because I first thought that she was a little bit slower than others, though, of course she wasn’t. I like a Southern flair in business, but I think you have to be conscious of being refined in the way you deliver it. It’s when the language is combined with like a heavy accent and you speak slowly that it can cause others to think the person wasn’t too smart, sometimes not even consciously.” The way that one speaks, to Ashley, can cause (and for her, did cause) certain perceptions upon first meeting that are linked specifically to intelligence. Shelby, additionally, recalled a similar experience, confessing a moment in which she judged another based on their language, tying her SUSE to a lack of intelligence. She recounted:

I know a woman from the hills of North Carolina, and she has a very, very strong dialect; so much so that [my seven-year-old son] asked me if she was British. When I spoke to her on the phone the first time, my natural reaction was to think that she probably wasn’t very educated or worldly. I don’t want to say like *dumb*, because I don’t think that people are dumb because of their accent, but I definitely thought, “She’s probably never left her little, small town.” Come to find out, she’s lived in Australia and all over the world, and traveled everywhere, and is really smart. It just made me realize that when someone first meets you, the way you’re speaking to someone kind of is your first impression.

Like Ashley's experience, Shelby had a moment of judgment based on SUSE use and indicated that that language creates a specific first impression; for her, it's often the first revelation of one's identity. It was Shelby's initial reaction to tie this to intelligence, though through time, this assumption proved false. Even those who use SUSE regularly and appreciate the regional variety are acutely aware of (and at times fall prey to) the assumptions of intelligence tied to the language use.

Linking identity with language is not uncommon, and SUSE perceived as unintelligent, as Ashley and Shelby reveal, is *also* not uncommon. Perhaps Olivia made the most compelling juxtaposition between her identity as a Southerner and her association of SUSE with intelligence level, offering a balanced view of the two. She (like Eliza and Courtney) associates the language variety with her identity and personality. She said, "I think once you've established relationships and rapport with partners and clients, then it's okay for a little more of your personality to definitely shine through." This positive perception, though, is juxtaposed with an association of SUSE with a lower intelligence level. In those scenarios where Olivia would not use SUSE in the workplace, she explained, "If you were talking to your CEO, you would want to put yourself in the best light and sound very well spoken and intelligent, so in a situation like that with upper management I wouldn't [use SUSE]." While she sees the language as part of her core identity, Olivia is also aware of the possible perceptions of that language use and how it functions as a marker of intelligence. However, this awareness of those negative perceptions did not stop her from using SUSE frequently in her emails (5.48%).

It seems, for all of the participants, that using SUSE introduces a conflict between risking presenting an uneducated professional identity to others and a propensity to allow

their personality to “shine through,” as Olivia described it. Such a dilemma requires rhetorical agility to balance, and striking that balance between perceptions of intelligence and the revelation of a Southern identity requires practice and a confidence in their careers and education. However, it is also predicated upon the audience to whom the women write and speak.

Relationship to Their Audience

A participant’s relationship to her audience is a significant condition for the possibility of SUSE use in a particular email communication. Importantly, though, the way that SUSE use relates to audience veers from both what participants revealed in their interviews and what might be expected. Participants indicated that in the majority of cases, they would opt *not* to use SUSE when speaking to someone of higher rank (like a CEO, for instance) and opt *not* to use SUSE when writing to individuals residing outside the Southern United States. These responses seem to be expected, based on what we know about how regional language is perceived in relationship to intelligence and how the language identifies a common in-group among participants (see previous section and Chapter 2’s “Leaning on Linguistics” section). Ashley mentioned directly: “If it’s a CEO of a company or I need to be more formal, then I don’t use it. I think Southern language is slang—not the accent but the language and the words.” Eliza added, “If I was talking to Porsche higher-ups, that’s an instance where I would definitely pull back [my SUSE use].” Most interview participants identified a certain executive level in which they would scale back their SUSE use. Additionally, many participants identified an audience’s geography as a marker of when to use—and when to not use—SUSE. Allison, for instance, who often works with colleagues in the Dominican Republic and China,

explained that when speaking or writing to these audiences, “If I’m trying to have a serious conversation with them, I wouldn’t use it [SUSE] because I’m not sure that they’d understand.” Or, Maria noted that she would never find it inappropriate to use SUSE with her clients from the South: “Of all of my Southern clients, there’s no one I definitely wouldn’t [use SUSE with]. Beyond that, I would hesitate.” These parameters set by the interview participants that are related to audience geography and rank don’t necessarily hold true across the board as hard-and-fast rules when examining the actual email artifacts.

The quantitative data reveal that, on the whole, most participants were willing to use SUSE with those audiences they were subordinate to (clients, coworkers of higher ranks, and bosses) with 52.03% of emails containing SUSE going to these categories of audiences. As an example, Velocity Marketing works with two very high-profile national automotive companies, one with locations all over the United States and one based in Chicago. All three participants who work at Velocity have emailed the top executives using elements of SUSE. Eliza, in a March 25, 2019 email said to the CEO of the first of the two aforementioned companies, “Within the next few weeks you, Sarah and I should be receiving some information about the next steps in the application process, so I’ll be working closely with **you all** to gather the appropriate info and assets to submit!” Maria sent to a California-based marketing executive of the same company, “Yes **ma’am**. Sent everything over to Sandy this morning. **Waiting on** feedback but I think we’re all good on this. I had the art team make banners based off your sample graphics as well. I’ll forward those to you! It’s been a crazy busy morning here!” And Ashley, Agency Principal of Velocity Marketing, wrote to a high-ranking manager of the Chicago-based

company, “**I figure** if you sell it in the meantime, at least we have another one to choose from.” In each of these instances, the organizational rank of the recipient was not a factor in deciding whether or not to incorporate SUSE.

Additionally, geographic location matters little when determining whether or not to use SUSE. Of all email artifacts available, 177 (or 31.27%) went to recipients residing outside the Southern United States. If this number were calibrated to account for only those participants who had the opportunity to work with others outside of the Southern states, the percentage would rise slightly to 33.78%. Allison provides the best example of this disconnect between what’s expected and what actually happens in the communicative moment. While she mentioned in her interview that she would avoid using SUSE with contacts residing outside the United States, many of her emails that contain SUSE elements had audiences in China and the Dominican Republic. In fact, 22 of her 42 emails (52.38%) containing SUSE went to audiences in these two countries and featured SUSE markers such as *you all*, *waiting on*, and *get me*.

So if rank of audience and location of audience matters less than expected, what *does* matter about the audience to allow for the possibility of SUSE use? Simply: rapport. Maria remarked, “In initial communications, where I’m just meeting a client or just getting to know a client, I would strictly use professional words, so I would say in the beginning stages of meeting a client until I felt comfortable enough to use those Southern-isms.” What Maria refers to as “comfort” here, Ashley refers to as “rapport.” For Ashley, building rapport with an audience is necessary first to then be able to speak more casually and with SUSE. Olivia ties these two ideas together saying that SUSE use is acceptable “once you’ve established relationships and rapport with partners and

clients.” Even Courtney, who uses SUSE in most scenarios, notes that it’s her relationship with her audiences that gives her confidence to use SUSE. She explained, “Even with my physicians...I’ve developed such a comfortable relationship with them that I just am who I am, and I’m alright with that. I feel like they’re good with it too.” These links between audience and rhetor are key in the exigence to use (or not use) SUSE, and they matter more than the status or geographical location of the audience. That is to say, it matters less who the audience is on their own and more how the writer relates to that audience. But the language use is complex here because not only is a relationship required for its use, but it, at the same time, assists in the building and strengthening of workplace relationships by helping the writer establish ethos (and rapport).

Invention, or the Rhetorical Strategies for SUSE Use

The previous section provided an overview of those exigencies that create the prime conditions for possible SUSE use—in other words, those elements that determine whether or not a writer deems it appropriate to incorporate SUSE. Yet, there is a more strategic way to approach the use of the regional variety that demonstrates the agency of the participants in their compositions. The rhetorical strategies they may implement through the language work to tie the stylistic elements of rhetorical composition tightly to the processes and canon of invention. Put another way, the linguistic choices to use SUSE have larger effects, considered at the invention stage, on the shaping of the argument in the email document.

Establishing Ethos, Strengthening Relationships

While a certain ethos, or rapport, is required between writer and audience to determine whether or not SUSE is appropriate, that same language use can also work to build ethos, or rapport, with audiences. Specifically, participants in this study revealed that using SUSE has in some way facilitated a connection between themselves and the recipient of their email, building productive workplace relationships with coworkers, clients, and more. There are two geographically centered ways that SUSE establishes ethos with audiences, according to participants. For audiences residing in the South, SUSE creates a commonality between writer and recipient. For audiences residing outside the South, SUSE allows writers to be memorable to audiences.

When participants communicate with those also residing in the Southern United States, the use of SUSE creates a common connection between writer and audience. Sloane indicated, “...it [SUSE] helps build relationships because you just got that in common” (as mentioned in Email Sample Analysis 2). But Sloane wasn’t the only participant to point out the ethos-building benefit to speaking in similar ways to her audience. Maria noted, “It [SUSE] just helps to build rapport because [your audience] thinks ‘Okay, this person talks like me or they sound like me. We must have something in common.’ People just feel more comfortable with you when they understand you or feel like they would understand you.” She specifically recalled a co-worker relationship that was strengthened by the language they both shared: “[Martha] at work is *so country*. So that’s how we started talking to each other in the office, and even in the stressful moments, it would make things more friendly, and sometimes laughable.” The common

language functioned as a catalyst to build a positive working relationship between the two women in which they were comfortable communicating with each other.

This comfort is key in the ethos building among Southerners, and several participants indicated the power of establishing that comfortable communication through language commonality. For instance, Allison, speaking about a work contact living in North Carolina, said, “I think sounding like him and speaking like him makes him feel more comfortable. It opens up the conversation to be a little more relaxed and free.” Ashley added, “I do use it [SUSE] with other Southerners and clients, even with those in powerful positions. It allows me to have more of a personal business relationship with them that’s more comfortable.” A comfortable ethos allows the participants to navigate the daily ups and downs of the marketing sector and maintain positive relationships with clients, coworkers, media, and more. The use of SUSE functions to build this ethos, and adding it into communications—that is, including it in the invention of communications—with others in the South is a rhetorical move that strengthens the communicative event.

With those audiences with whom using SUSE would *not* necessarily create commonality, such as those residing outside the Southern United States, the language still proves beneficial in establishing ethos for the writer. Olivia explained that those outside the South, rather than perceiving unintelligence, often perceive the language as warm. She said, “I feel like sometimes people think you’re a little warmer, so it’s easier to get to know you. They feel like you’re more genuine.” Maria added, “They [recipients of emails outside the American South] maybe don’t feel like you’re as threatening as a person because you’re more Southern.” This gentleness seems to ease non-Southerners into

conversation more readily, giving them the perception that a rhetor is relatable and approachable—both significant factors of ethos necessary for productive relationships in the field of marketing.

Though this positive ethos-building perspective was most common among participants, there was one who considered SUSE to be detrimental to positive ethos formation. Because Polly has such a negative view of SUSE in the workplace, she believes that using SUSE would harm her ethos with many audiences. She explained, “Relationships are going to come either way, but you’ll come off as more educated if you speak without a Southern drawl.” For her, the use of SUSE would negatively impact her ethos with her audience, rendering her to be uneducated or unintelligent. Despite this perception, Polly does not maintain this same view when interacting with others with a heavy Southern drawl, revealing an inconsistency in her understanding of ethos and SUSE use. Polly was present for a small portion of my interview with Courtney. When asked about how SUSE might help develop workplace relationships, Courtney turned to Polly and asked, “I don’t know [Polly], do you think my accent helped us create a relationship?” Polly responded, “Well, yes. It made you seem like you were very inviting; the way you talk is very welcoming. If someone’s short and abrupt, you certainly don’t want to go any further than that, but your voice draws people in.” This paradox, of Polly not wanting to use SUSE herself but appreciating it in others, could have to do with her outlook towards education and being self-aware that without a college degree (which Courtney has), her day-to-day performance and presentation must be the primary marker of ethos.

Whether the participant believes that using SUSE would build or hinder the creation of good ethos with the audience, each participant indicated that the language has an impact on how they build rapport inside a business setting. Specifically, SUSE has a rhetorical purpose present at the point of invention. Each participant knows that she needs positive workplace relationships, and the language she uses can help facilitate that. As they compose emails—mini daily arguments—to a variety of audiences, the choice to insert or edit out SUSE impacts the perception of the writer to the audience. For many, SUSE works well to create a solid, lasting connection with workplace contacts.

Calls to Action that Solicit Desired Responses

Such an ethos, built through the use of SUSE, helps writers make arguments that elicit positive responses. Several participants indicated that using SUSE allowed them to make requests without appearing to be too demanding, often leading to that request being granted. Ashley explains it this way, as she recalled one of her first jobs. She said,

When I was in college, I worked at [a book sales company]. It was a telemarketing company, and so my job was to take a stack of leads and just dial for dollars. I would ask people to buy a book or to start a free trial, and I would call people during dinnertime. This is in the early '90s or late '80s. I would always pick out the Tennessee and the Alabama leads, and I had better results with the Southern peeps. I would always say [increases her Southern drawl], "Hi. This is [Ashley] calling you from [company]. How are y'all." I would turn on Southern charm and use Southern words to connect and gain rapport with these people. It helped me in my sales.

Her use of the language here led to positive outcomes for the argument she was making, and this trend is evident in the quantitative data available for participants. Of all the emails sent by Ashley containing markers of SUSE, 40.11% of them were made as requests. Furthermore, all 11 participants whose emails I had access to evaluate included request emails with features of SUSE. As an example, Eliza submitted a request to a tee-shirt printer and asked, at the end of the email, “Can **you all** do this by Thursday EOD?” The email, sent on Saturday, September 5, 2020 asked for a quick turnaround from the company, as the standard order time is two weeks. However, Eliza’s request was granted by the company. It may not have been granted *only* because Eliza included a SUSE marker (*you all*), but the inclusion of this marker did influence how Eliza’s request was crafted for maximum effectiveness in the invention stage. The approachability and comfort conveyed by the SUSE use (mentioned above in the “Establishing Ethos” segment), works to ensure positive responses like this one.

Relieving Tension in the Rhetorical Situation

Beyond building ethos and soliciting positive responses through SUSE, the regional language works rhetorically to ease tensions between writer and audience in three ways: by tempering heated responses, by conveying friendliness to testy clients, and by establishing respect. Allison was one of the few participants who used SUSE in confrontational emails (16.67% of her artifacts were confrontational in tone), many of which used the phrase *you all*, even if the recipient of the message was a single individual. As examples, in two email exchanges, Allison uses the phrase *you all* to place responsibility on the recipient. To two equal-level coworkers based in the Dominican Republic, she writes in two back-to-back emails:

Hi [Luz] and [Petra],

After discussing with [Joss] it seems like he has already received the correct 15oz dust covers so we should be good there.

He has also received dust covers for the 9oz but the Vanilla name is incorrect so we need to get that reprinted. **Please send me the actual dust cover dieline with wick hole and tab in the next hour!**⁴⁷ I will send [Joss] a mock up version today and **you all** will work to get it reprinted ASAP once I redo the artwork and send it back to you.

[Luz] and [Petra], please confirm you understand I need the dieline in the next hour.

Thanks,

[Allison]

Hi [Petra] and [Luz],

It has been over an hour now since my last email. We have to communicate, I asked for confirmation of whether this can happen or not. Emails can not just go ignored. I am expected to send [Joss] this mock up today and I **can not send it** without first receiving a dieline from **you all**. Could someone please send me this dieline!!

Thanks,

[Allison]

⁴⁷ Note that the bold, highlighted portions are both bold and highlighted in the original message.

In these urgent, yet firm messages, Allison is clear about the need for a response from Petra and Luz. Her message is pointed, and it identifies the two as being responsible for the delay through the use of *you all* (indicated in the message in bold font, without highlighting). Though she only needs a response from one of the recipients, her desire is to *not* place the blame on just one of them. Of this exchange, she said:

So this is me getting a little feisty. It's me reiterating that I need a response, and I tried to kind of get stern in the email, but not stern enough to be like 'You're f'ing up.' I'll use *you all* kind of inclusively, to make the person I'm talking to not feel completely attacked by me. I really only needed a response from [Luz] in this case. [Petra] just happened to be part of the earlier conversation about it.

The use of *you all* in this instance allowed Allison to be more direct with [Luz] without singling him out individually. This same practice is repeated in another confrontational conversation that Allison had with a supplier, Luka, in China. In this exchange, Allison writes:

Hi [Luka],

It looks like you printed the label on metallic substrate but didn't let the copper pantone show through without a white layer like I specifically explained to **you all**. This label is wrong.

Thanks,

[Allison]

Here, again, Allison uses *you all* to more gently place blame on the recipient. Unlike the message to Luz and Petra, Allison sent this message to just one recipient (Luka), yet she uses the second-person plural uncontracted phrase *you all*. Here, she explained, "I feel

like with this one, I'm getting a different point across that you *and everyone who worked on this* messed up. Not *just* you. Again, I didn't want just one person to feel attacked by me." The ability to incorporate a plural second person-phrase (essentially, the full form of *y'all*) allows Allison to be slightly gentler in her blame-placing in these confrontational emails.

Southern phrases, though, do not merely lessen harshness; they can instead convey friendliness to help ease tensions in confrontational messages. Like Allison, Anne incorporated SUSE in a few confrontational emails during her time at Sweetgrass Marketing, particularly to one client, Michael, who had a reputation for responding negatively and aggressively to her. Of her relationship with this client, Anne said: "This is a lawyer client, and he's the worst. He's an attorney and doesn't speak to me like I know what I'm doing, and he's just really condescending." Anne chose to use the contracted form *y'all* in her communications with him. In an email thread (all sent on January 2, 2020), she uses *y'all* (marked in bold) to increase the friendliness of her message:

Hi [Michael],

Here is the link for the "rough draft" of new website for you and the rest of the firm to peruse: [Link Inserted in Original Document].

I wanted to point out a few areas we're still working on:

- I realized as we were putting the final touches on the page that I had completely overlooked Peter's drop down lists on his bio page - I don't see any content for his Education, Bar & Court Admissions, Awards, or

Publications drop-down lists in the document that you shared with me,
which is my fault entirely for not realizing/mentioning sooner.

- [List Continues with 4 More Incomplete Items]

And, as always, please let me know your thoughts and any changes **y'all** would like to make to the website in general.

Thanks so much and hope you have a wonderful day!

[Anne]! Happy new year. Just getting back in from the disjointed two weeks. I am circulating your final draft of the site to the team for all their comments. We will get edits to you this week for final launch. Hope you and yours had a good holiday season.

Thanks so much for the update [Michael]! And glad to hear **y'all** had a great holiday! I'll look for those edits later this week. Have a great Tuesday!

This email exchange presents a scenario in which Anne must convey that parts of a project are incomplete and, in some instances, that it is her fault (she wrote: "...which is my fault entirely for not realizing/mentioning sooner"). However, she strives to write in the most positive light possible, and *y'all* is a key player in that tone she seeks to establish. In her choice to use *y'all* here, Anne reflects that she was attempting to be overly nice and had prepared herself for a harsh response. She said, "I know I thought about, over-thought about, my wording in these emails because I didn't want to say anything wrong. I think with *y'all*, I thought 'Well, you can always catch more flies with

honey.’” In this case, the tone, which incorporates a marker of SUSE (twice), garnered a positive response in return. In both Anne’s and Allison’s cases, the Southern terminology helped to cool tense relationships and rhetorical situations.

In addition to relieving this kind of tension, Margarita indicates that SUSE can quell tensions before they even begin by establishing respectfulness, specifically through the use of *ma’am* and *sir*. She stated, “Respect is such a big thing in how I communicate with others.” This, for Margarita, sets the tone of the relationship so that the audience knows that in future conflicts the respect will be maintained. Such a focus on respect stems from Margarita’s connection to the Spanish language. She explained:

This is a cultural thing, I think. When I’m talking to my grandma in Spanish, I’m going to use *usted* and whatever grammatical ending that delineates because that’s a sign of respect. I would do this when I’m talking to somebody older than myself or someone I don’t know professionally. I think it kind of goes back to the same thing in English. If I don’t feel like I’m on the same level with that person, it’s *ma’am* or *sir* for respect.

This element of SUSE allows Margarita to establish a respectful dialog with each encounter. Polly reiterates this point. As little as she appreciates SUSE in the workplace, she does consistently use *ma’am* and *sir* in her email communications. When asked why, she said “I use it [*ma’am*] with my elders and sometimes with others because it’s respectful.” The respectful nature of the language, particularly *ma’am* and *sir*, offers writers an opportunity to set a foundational tone that allows conflicts to arise without them being detrimental to the relationship. In each of these scenarios, the language

provides the opportunity for writers to establish and maintain positive workplace relationships.

Intervention, or a New Avenue for Student Preparation

Although the exigencies exist for writers to use (or not use) SUSE in their professional communications, and though the participants of this study acknowledge the rhetorical significance of using their regional dialect, none of the participants who attended college or formally studied business indicated that they learned, or were even introduced to, the notion of using anything *other* than standard, edited English in their business writing classrooms. These participants, instead, learned on the job, sometimes in less-than-ideal scenarios (such as Shelby's, Allison's, or Ashley's negative experiences using SUSE), and sometimes by trial and error. Many of the participants, who attended their undergraduate institutions between the 1980s and 2017, lacked access to a curriculum that attuned to the more localized linguistic influences present in modern professional communication, and even current curriculums (as of the writing of this dissertation in 2021) lack an attention to the significance of place on business writing. The next chapter offers an intervention for student preparation so that they may encounter the rich linguistic variety present in business communications before they step foot on the job, better equipping them to establish ethos with clients, compose emails that solicit positive responses, and communicate in ways that can reduce tension in often already stressful environments.

CHAPTER 6: PEDAGOGICAL CONCLUSIONS

What many of the women who participated in this study have in common is a lack of instruction, especially in the university system, about the significance of language variety in corporate marketing communications and the development of relationships with clients and colleagues in the workplace. None remembered ever learning to use their SUSE to their advantage. Anne specifically remembers her instruction about her language variety in college. She said:

I picked up what I know [about SUSE] through school. My teachers would say that if you need to communicate professionally—at the time it was like in research papers and that kind of stuff—then you need to not use idioms and things that people might not understand, like ‘over yonder’ or something like that.

Instead, we were to use professional language and intellectual language.

She recalled an experience at a technical institution where she took college classes during high school in preparation for the university setting saying, “Taking those basic English classes, they would tell you that unless you’re quoting someone else, don’t use those [colloquial] words.” Plus, many participants indicated that they were encouraged to only use an edited version of English deemed appropriate for professional settings. For instance, Eliza explains that at her university, although it was located in the South, her professors, overall, were not Southern. She said:

[My professors] weren't Southern, and they didn't have Southern accents. It was pretty much a general rule of thumb, especially in media relations and communications, that you need to learn to speak professionally. All throughout college, I think that specifically came through because they were from the Northeast.

Though many participants were directed to avoid SUSE, the workplace setting is much more dynamic and requires a flexibility of regional language use that allows writers to rhetorically engage with their audiences. From interviewing these women, it was clear that their understanding of their SUSE use in professional settings was acquired on the job with hands-on experience, not necessarily in the college classroom.

A Gap in Our Materials: Missing and Incomplete Attention to Linguistic Variation in Business Writing Curriculums and Textbooks

As an instructor of business writing and communication, I had to ask myself, can we do better to prepare students to rhetorically use their language variety to build lasting, meaningful connections on the job? I wondered what business and professional writing textbooks are teaching students *now*—five to ten years after many of my participants have been in a college classroom. In order to understand the need for instructional support for students in regional language use, I had to understand what is lacking in current curriculums and textbook materials. For this reason, I examined the professional writing and communications textbooks available from the four major textbook suppliers who offer such texts: Pearson, Cengage, McGraw Hill, and MacMillan Learning.

As a small research study of its own, this examination of textbooks followed a specific method. First, I crafted a list of the major textbook publishers that serve the

majority of institutions (from R1 to technical colleges). As of 2018, just five textbook suppliers accounted for 80% of the industry's profits: Pearson, Scholastic, McGraw-Hill, Cengage, and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt (Echevarria and Bowman). Michigan State University's *Global Edge* resource identified several additional textbook publishers that provide a significant number of texts to universities nationwide, including Emerald Group Publishing, MacMillan Learning, Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, Wiley, and Wolters Kluwer ("Textbook Publishers"). With this list in hand, I searched each publisher's website for texts specifically related to: professional writing, professional communication, business writing, business communication, workplace writing, and workplace communication. Texts that were excluded from this study are any published before 2016, texts about "technical" writing and communication, texts focused on writing professionally in a particular specified industry, and texts that were edited collections of scholarly work (and not necessarily textbooks intended for student use). Four publishing companies provided textbooks that fit the study parameters: Pearson, Cengage, McGraw Hill, and MacMillan Learning. The following textbooks from these four publishers are included in this study:

Bernhardt, Stephen and Nancy Sommers. *A Guide to Professional Writing*.

MacMillan Learning, 2019.

Cardon, Peter W. *Business Communication: Developing Leaders for a Networked*

World, 4th Edition. McGraw Hill, 2021.

Haas, John William. *Business and Professional Communication in the*

Information Age. MacMillan Learning, 2018.

Kolin, Philip C. *Successful Writing at Work*, 11th Edition. Cengage, 2017.

Ramsey, Jon. *Business Writing Scenarios: Writing from the Inside*. MacMillan Learning, 2016.

Rentz, Kathryn and Paul Lentz. *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach*. McGraw Hill, 2018.

Searles, George J. *Workplace Communications, The Basics*, 8th Edition. Pearson, 2019.

Shwom, Barbara G. and Lisa Gueldenzoph Snyder. *Business Communication: Polishing your Professional Presence*, 4th Edition. Pearson, 2018.

To analyze these texts and understand how they approach using regional language (or, more broadly, language that varies from edited English), I used one of two methods depending upon the text's medium. If the textbook was digital, I performed a search of the full text using the program's search function. If I had the textbook in hardcopy, I performed a search using the provided index. I looked for the following terms, developed to reflect how textbook publishers might categorize this information: *dialect*, *accent*, *nonstandard (English)*, *regional (language)*, *colloquial*, *slang*, *vernacular*. Though I do not view regional dialects to be synonymous with many of these terms, I chose them because of their ubiquity of use in reference to regional dialects. Several texts mention *accent marks* when writing to those of different cultural backgrounds; I have omitted this use of *accent* from the chart below. The following textbooks provided information for students about these six search terms. Table 6.1 below indicates with an "x" those terms available in each textbook search. NS represents the word *nonstandard*. *Regional*, *colloquial*, and *vernacular* have been abbreviated in the header.

Table 6.1: Textbooks and Presence of Search Terms

Textbook	<i>Dialect</i>	<i>Accent</i>	<i>NS</i>	<i>Reg.</i>	<i>Colloq.</i>	<i>Vern.</i>	<i>Slang</i>
Bernhardt & Sommers				X			X
Cardon			X	X			X
Haas	X	X					
Kolin			X		X		
Ramsey							X
Rentz & Lentz			X		X		X
Searles			X		X	X	X
Shwom & Snyder	X	X	X				X

Once I had identified those texts that addressed the use of language varieties in professional communications, I turned to the specific chapters and entries to see if the textbook authors guided students in *how* to use their language varieties or steered students away from the use of such language in favor of a more standard, edited form of English, or Plain English. Table 6.2 below indicates with an “x” how textbooks address language variety (LV). *Instructional* is abbreviated as Inst. and *Professional Communication* is abbreviated as Prof. Comm.

Table 6.2: Textbooks and Support for Using LV

Textbook	Inst. Support for Using LV	Instructed to Avoid LV in Prof. Comm.	No Mention of Using LV
Bernhardt & Sommers		X	
Cardon	X		
Haas		X	
Kolin		X	
Ramsey		X	

Rentz & Lentz	X		
Searles		X	
Shwom & Snyder		X	

Most of the texts simply instruct students to avoid any writing other than professional or Plain English, avoiding slang, colloquialisms, and regional speech. Even those texts that do acknowledge the rhetorical nature of business communication in terms of language variety do not provide in-depth instruction, but merely a passing acknowledgement. As an example of a mandate for staunch avoidance of language variety, Searles in *Workplace Communication*, advises students directly, “A slangy, vernacular style is out of place in workplace writing” (Searles). In reference to international communication, he draws another directive that he applies to *all* professional communications. He writes:

Colloquialisms vary greatly around the world, even among native speakers of English in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales, Canada, and elsewhere. Therefore, they should definitely be avoided when writing to readers outside the United States. Even contractions—which can be seen as too informal—should not appear. The same is true of slang, abbreviations, acronyms, and other varieties of nonstandard phrasing. Of course, *it’s always better to avoid such expressions in workplace writing*, but especially so in transcultural situations. These usages not only increase the likelihood of miscommunication but are difficult or impossible to translate meaningfully if your writing must be recast in your reader’s language. (Searles, emphasis mine)

In *Business Communication: Polishing your Professional Presence*, Shwom and Snyder simply call for students to “avoid slang,” and in *Business and Professional*

Communication in the Information Age, Haas instructs students to actively “compensate for a strong accent” (Shwom and Snyder, Haas 96). Similarly, Ramsey addresses the concept of slang in his text, *Business Writing Scenarios: Writing from the Inside*. While his approach connects slang to positive, friendly relationships, he warns against using informalities in the workplace, creating a divide between professional relationships and personal ones. He writes,

Consider always that different co-workers and managers in a professional organization will have different communication expectations, and ***many will not be impressed by professional writing that is presumptuously familiar and includes slang***, chattiness, and the vagueness that often characterize the interactions among friends when they “hang out” together or communicate over cell phones or through texting and tweeting. So be prepared to use a more formal style when you are writing in the context of your work responsibilities. (Ramsey, emphasis mine).

Kolin, too, in *Successful Writing at Work*, warns against the use of slang by writing:

Slang refers to anything that is not considered proper, or standard, English, such as telling someone that “It ain’t nothing” or asking “What you doing?” ***Use formal, standard English in your writing unless you are quoting or writing dialogue...*** Colloquialisms are words and phrases that are common in various areas of the country but are not considered proper English and may not be understood by all of your readers...***Although we all use colloquialisms in our daily conversations, they are not appropriate to use...*** (Kolin 520, emphasis mine).

Though these texts (Searles, Shwom and Snyder, Ramsey, and Kolin) take a fairly rigid stance, others do address language variety more positively, though in incomplete ways.

In *A Guide to Professional Writing*, Bernhardt and Sommers offer a definition of *localization* as “The practice of producing something, such as a text, for a specific regional, national, or cultural audience” (Bernhardt and Sommers). This definition indicates a need for region-specific communication in professional settings, yet the authors offer little guidance about what a localized communication might look like in practice. Instead, they simply provide students with a short directive about slang use that is indeed much more flexible than many other texts. They write, “A conversational, informal tone is appropriate in many situations, but be careful about using slang or highly informal terms that may exclude some readers or be viewed as offensive” (Bernhardt and Sommers). While Bernhardt and Sommers do not outright ban slang from professional communications, they do warn students about the potential pitfalls of incorporating it in their writing.

Cardon’s *Business Communication: Developing Leaders for a Networked World* offers brief instructional support for students that attunes to language differences. In a section about “cultural intelligence,” Cardon indicates that “regional differences may impact communication” and that “your ability to identify norms and values associated with various groups will help you throughout your career as you work with others” (Cardon 132). However, this directive is not supported by practical instructional support *except* when referencing workplace instant-messaging communication. Offering a fictional scenario between Jaclyn and Haniz, Cardon writes:

Until you know the IM style of others in the workplace, you should err on the side of complete sentences and standard language conventions...Jaclyn uses complete sentences and standard language conventions, while Haniz uses abbreviated language and acronyms. Haniz should consider adopting more standard language conventions to match Jaclyn's style. On the other hand, Jaclyn should notice that Haniz enjoys using some abbreviated language. Jaclyn may consider using some nonstandard language conventions when instant messaging with Haniz. (Cardon 218)

Cardon opts for a framework for students that asks them to read the rhetorical situation and align their own writing style to that of their audience. This approach, though, is only applied in practice to instant-message communication—too narrow a medium to convey the significance of language variety in the workplace as a whole. Despite his call for flexibility in workplace IM communications, Cardon still strongly suggests that students “avoid slang” because it is an indicator of inexperience and may “annoy some readers” (Cardon 184).

Rentz and Lentz's *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach* provides perhaps the best instruction about how workplace communications can be positively influenced by language variety use, specifically in the authors' section about email communications. The authors offer three levels of emails: casual, informal, and formal. They indicate that “casual” language, which includes “slang,” “colloquialisms,” “contractions,” and “personal pronouns” should be reserved only for emails with “close friends” and “only when you know your readers well” (Rentz and Lentz 102). However, the authors make a concession that is key for understanding workplace communication in

what they deem an “informal” email, which *blends* the occasional colloquialism with more formal messaging (Rentz and Lentz 103). This brief section in this textbook demonstrates a more rhetorically sound approach to business communication that I believe still requires more attention than the short paragraph Rentz and Lentz devote to it.

Surely, not all instructors of professional communication are using these exact texts, but they do provide a baseline upon which to understand the conversation about business, professional, and workplace communication available to students on a large scale. Essentially, if major textbook producers are not adequately addressing language variety in their textbooks, we can surmise that many curriculums across the country that utilize these textbooks also do not address language variety in business communications to its fullest extent (unless, of course, an instructor makes a specific point to supplement their textbook with additional materials about language variation and business communication). If, from this dissertation research, we may realize that language variety has a significant place in workplace writing—as it does for the participants of this dissertation study using SUSE—then there must be a responsible way to integrate this practice into our textbooks and curriculums so that emerging business writers may encounter the practice of using their language varieties before they enter the workforce.

What’s Being Done: Current Conversations about Language Variety, Rhetorical Genre Studies Pedagogy, and Business Writing Instruction

Knowing how to improve our textbooks and curriculums to better account for language variety use must be rooted in current research beyond the data presented in this dissertation. Several professional writing researchers have developed pedagogies based in rhetorical genre studies, some of which begin to attune to language difference through

considerations of translingualism. The following section provides an overview of rhetorical genre studies as a pedagogical practice, situates rhetorical genres studies within business writing curriculums through an approach to genres as flexible, and links rhetorical genre studies with translingualism. This foundation of current scholarship provides a platform for integrating the results of this dissertation research into a pedagogical intervention that combines instruction in business writing, rhetorical genre studies, and sociolinguistic language variation.

Currently, the most ubiquitous approach to the teaching of professional communication is through rhetorical genre studies, and teaching genres as situated in rhetorical situations is already common practice in business writing classrooms. Bhatia notes that genre analysis is “one of the most popular and useful tools to analyse academic and professional genres for ESP [English for Specific Purposes] applications” (*Critical* 6). In “Genre Pedagogies,” Amy J. Devitt writes, pointing to the accepted approach to genre studies, “Contemporary understanding sees genres as rhetorical acts rather than textual conventions” (146). She further argues that genre pedagogies are three-fold: “teaching particular genres, teaching genre awareness, and teaching genre critique” (147). Primarily these three tenants help students gain “access” to various genres, learn how to locate and analyze new genres of writing, and understand the cultural implications of various genres (147). But simply teaching genres as rhetorical—without an intentional focus on language variation—is not enough to prepare students for the workplace. The field is only just beginning to make strides in classroom application of language diversity in business writing curriculums through pedagogical interventions that (1) focus on flexibility of genres and (2) nod towards the significance of translingualism.

Pointing to this flexibility, Patricia Welsh Droz and Lorie Stagg Jacobs, in “Genre Chameleon: Email, Professional Writing Curriculum, and Workplace Writing Expectations,” establish a disconnect between professional writing curriculums and the lived experiences of writing professionals, much in the way current textbooks seem misaligned with the language variety use of writers. Specifically, with the genre of email, Droz and Jacobs indicate that instructors of professional writing are not approaching the genre of email correctly, but are abiding by “prescribed grammar, a set of rules for its form and function that should be deployed in all events” (81). They counter by noting:

However, in the workplace, email does not follow prescribed rules from textbooks; it has a new, descriptive grammar, altogether—a set of rules deployed in individual workplaces that may not carry over to the next employer. So, this article proposes that email should be taught as what we have termed a chameleon genre, a genre that does whatever its users want it to do. (81)

For Droz and Jacobs, the only responsible pedagogical approach to this chameleon genre—the email—is to allow it to break free from the conventions of textbooks and what’s expected or assumed by the phrase *professional communication*. Their classroom solution is to return to threshold concepts, particularly that genres are changing and not “stable” or with “fixed sets of conventions” (82). The “descriptive grammar” that Droz and Jacobs mention veers from the “rules of textbooks,” and such a discussion of this veering finds roots in questions of code-meshing and translingualism (both addressed in detail in Chapters 1 and 2), as these concepts in pedagogical application offer an avenue of approaching language that veers from the “rules of textbooks” (81).

To teach this practice of breaking genre conventions, Hai Nguyen and Jennifer Miller offer a method of genre analysis of replicated business documents and scenarios that specifically asks students to examine cultural differences in communication in “Exploring Business Request Genres: Students’ Rhetorical Choices.” They write that students may uncover “diverse perspectives on culture and rhetoric in business letters,” adding that such an approach offers an opportunity for students to realize that “a focus on the reader mean[s] taking into consideration the cultural tradition of the audience and relevant rhetorical conventions” (18). In performing genre analysis, students have the opportunity to move from a “rigid approach to writing in their replication of formulas and the application of ‘rules’” to instead “the more flexible approach of business practitioners” (21). They conclude that in order to assist students in becoming flexible with their language and writing in business communications, instructors must introduce genres as flexible and rhetorically situated and instructors must teach students to account for the culture of the workplace and the audiences (21).

Similarly, Andre and Schneider contend that the teaching of genres is paramount in students’ success in writing workplace genres that do not follow rigid conventions. They explain that “instruction in genre forms should never portray genres simply as textual forms incorporating characteristic features or present genre conventions as decontextualized absolutes” (210). Instead, instructors should demonstrate “that although their education provides a basis for the acquisition of nonacademic genres, the classroom cannot impart to them everything they will need to know in order to write competently in a workplace setting” and offer students a “contextualized” and “rhetorical” approach to writing” in various genres (211). This contextualized approach would allow students to

attune to the language differences of their audiences and the norms of their workplace. This approach, too, would allow instructors a platform upon which to discuss language variety and diversity in the business writing classroom.

So where might this change begin? Stephany Brett Dustan and Audrey J. Jaeger explain that primarily instructors must be educated about “language diversity” in order to even begin to address it in the classroom (796). As instructors and researchers familiar with the composition and rhetoric scholarship about linguistic diversity, I believe we are beyond this point of educating ourselves. We *know* that language diversity is significant in the classroom and in student writing (and honestly, in writing in general). We must now, though, put this knowledge into practice specifically in the business writing classroom. Currently, scholarship in genre studies merely nods to the incorporation of translingual models, especially when linked to business communications.

Though they are not writing about the business writing classroom specifically, both Laura Aull and Laura Gonzales examine the significance of language variety and translingualism in a genre-based approach to pedagogy. In “Linguistic Attention in Rhetorical Genre Studies and First-Year Writing,” Aull explains that in a rhetorical genre analytical pedagogy, “linguistic attention should supplement, not supplant, attention to macro-level details” (Aull). This linguistic attention, while not to override the larger rhetorical implications of a piece, is significant in understanding a genre. Similarly, Gonzales in “Multimodality, Translingualism, and Rhetorical Genre Studies” explains that rhetorical genre studies is only beginning to adopt the attunement to linguistic variation indicative of philosophies of translingualism. She writes:

Disciplinary boundaries between multimodal composition, translingualism, and RGS are beginning to shift, moving the discipline away from the single language/single mode model that does not adequately account for the lived experiences of contemporary composition students...further emphasis on translingualism and multimodality can help RGS continue to reflect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of composition students (Gonzales).

There is clearly a need to bring more linguistic-focused, translingual pedagogies into rhetorical genre studies, especially when this pedagogy is implemented for business writing instruction.

In “Beyond the Genre Fixation: A Translingual Perspective on Genre,” Anis Bawarshi, perhaps sets the stage best for merging the study of language variation and genre studies in the classroom. He writes:

Despite work in rhetorical genre studies (RGS) that treats genres as dynamic social and cognitive phenomena, only stabilized for now (Schryer, "The Lab") and always subject to improvisations (Berkenkotter and Huckin, Devitt, Freadman, Paré, Russell, Schryer), dominant pedagogical approaches still fixate on genres as relatively static objects to be taught and acquired as part of disciplinary and professional enculturation. (244)

Instead, Bawarshi indicates that instructors using rhetorical genre studies should see “genre difference not as a deviation from a patterned or recurrent norm, but rather as the norm of all genre performance” (244). For Bawarshi, viewing translingual pedagogies in tandem with rhetorical genre studies is paramount in understanding how genres function in lived experiences. If we are to bring this concept into the classroom, which I believe

aligns with the results of this dissertation study where participants routinely express linguistic difference as a normative, generic behavior, we must see language variation as a common practice within genres. So with a desire for a more linguistically diverse approach to rhetorical genre studies, a dissertation study that indicates an appreciation for varied language use in the workplace among participants, and an apparent gap in textbook instruction about linguistic variation, I seek, in the next section, to propose a pedagogical intervention into the way curriculums present the use of language beyond “professional” English in college business writing classrooms.

Steps for Progress: Sociolinguists, Rhetoric, and Genre as a Combined Approach to Business Writing Instruction

If business writing instructors know, through studies in rhetoric and composition and through the data presented in this dissertation study, that regional language influences business and professional communications, what might we do pedagogically to prepare students for this reality? I believe this intervention begins with textbook entries that allow for flexibility in language use for students; these textbook materials should be coupled with classroom instruction and activities that support students’ understanding of genres as spaces for rhetorical applications of language varieties.

A textbook directive, such as the one from Searles in *Workplace Communications, The Basics* stating, “A slangy, vernacular style is out of place in workplace writing,” runs counter to the lived experiences of professionals as they communicate (Searles). In fact, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when much communication shifted from face-to-face to written, digital messages, Kate Morgan notes in “How Young Workers Are Changing the Rules of ‘Business Speak’” that today’s

generation of professionals is working towards a more relaxed style of communication, indicating that in written communication, there seems to be less of a barrier between personal and professional lives—and personal and professional styles of writing (Morgan). Particularly, the younger workforce is “less willing to do the same ‘code-switching’ that past generations have” between a home dialect and a professional tone because they value both authenticity and diversity in the workplace (Morgan). If there is already such a shift happening, if the field’s research supports this type of diverse communication in the workplace, and if we know that new students entering the business world from our classrooms will be encountering such forms of communication, we must shift our instructional materials to reflect these realities.

Textbook Intervention

Currently, only two examined textbooks from mainstream publishers support the use of a language variety in the workplace for strategic communication: Cardon’s *Business Communication: Developing Leaders for a Networked World* and Rentz and Lentz’s *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach*. Both texts, published relatively recently (in 2021 and 2018, respectively) are a move in the right direction toward acceptance of language variety in workplace writing, yet they still only scratch the surface. Rentz and Lentz specifically (if you recall from the textbook study detailed above in “A Gap in Our Materials”) address the informality acceptable in some email communications. This particular lesson is key in helping students learn how to communicate using cultural and regional language varieties, yet it requires more attention than Rentz and Lentz give to this concept.

To enhance further the instructional support of the Rentz and Lentz text, textbook authors should consider a section or chapter devoted to language, rhetoric, and generic communication as these three concepts overlap. Specifically, this section should include together (1) appreciation of language difference in the workplace (what Cardon calls “cultural intelligence”) rooted in sociolinguistic research, (2) a rhetorical orientation toward communicative moments in which the writer considers the context, audience, and purpose of a written texts in order to compose using the most effective and appropriate words for the occasion, and (3) an explanation of workplace genres that positions them as fluid and interdiscursive (Cardon 132). What major textbooks currently offer is incomplete without combining these three concepts into one cohesive lesson about regional and cultural language use in the workplace.

Classroom Pedagogical Activities

With an instructional mechanism in place in a classroom’s textbook, the instructor may build upon this with specific classroom activities that teach a combined approach—sociolinguistic, rhetorical, and generic—to professional composition. As noted in current scholarship about rhetorical genre studies, teaching genres rhetorically is paramount to assisting students in their preparation for workplace writing. Furthermore, in “Writing for Non-Profits in a Professionally-Oriented Institution: Rhetorical Genre Studies to Teach Flexibility,” Gindlesparger argues that in order for students to understand the rhetorical nature of genres in future workplace scenarios, a pedagogical focus on flexibility in writing within those genres is of utmost importance (Gindlesparger 55). The following three activities offer a flexible, rhetorical genre approach, but with a new spin on classic

rhetorical genre studies pedagogical activities that asks students to specifically attune to sociolinguistic factors within generic compositions.

Genre Analysis

In a genre analysis exercise, instructors choose to provide students with a communication artifact that falls within a particular genre. Instructors ask students not only to analyze the rhetorical situation of the produced artifact, but to examine the specific word choices of the writer, noting how those word choices reveal the author's personal writing style through a professional document (or, how the document reflects interdiscursivity). A possible document appropriate for this exercise could be a recent press release from April 23, 2020 entitled "Pabst's Lone Star Beer Releases New Mexican Lager." In this press release from Austin, TX, the author relies on the language of the region—of both eastern Texas and the West—to explain their new beer product.

The first paragraph reads:

Lone Star Beer announces the latest line in the beloved family of Lone Star Beers:

Rio Jade (Ree-Oh Hah-Day). Rio Jade: The New Taste of Texas, is a Mexican-style lager inspired by the appreciation for Texas' diverse lands and waterways.

The beer will be available throughout Texas starting in late April, with full distribution in May, for a limited time until the end of summer. In light of current events, to assist those who have supported its beer for generations, Lone Star is also launching a goodwill initiative called **Keep The Lights On Y'all** to help support members of the bar and restaurant community during these uncertain times. ("Pabst's Lone Star Beer")

Discussion questions for such a document would ask students to consider the rhetorical situation (the audience of beer lovers, the ethos of the Lone Star Beer Company called “The National Beer of Texas,” and the context of “these uncertain times” in reference to the COVID-19 pandemic). Then, instructors would task students with examining the linguistic choices with questions like: Why did the author feel the need to explain how to pronounce *Rio Jade*? Why is the “goodwill initiative” called “Keep The Lights On Y’all”? And to understand the genre, what is the function of the ‘press release’ and how does this document fulfil that purpose? These questions paired together may help students recognize the overlap between sociolinguistic language choices, rhetorical situations, and generic communication.

Genre Revision

Instructors may build on the genre analysis activity through an assignment that asks students to use a particular business-genre artifact and, by changing one factor of the rhetorical situation, alter the language in use in the document. For such an exercise, a professional email may be the most appropriate artifact for examination, as it often has a very distinct author, audience, and message. As an example, I have selected one from this dissertation research study. For students, the instructor should provide the rhetorical situation of the communicative moment. In the case of the email below, it was composed by a marketing professional working for a company based in the American South. The audience is a client (a major retailer whose headquarters is in Minneapolis, MN) seeking information about an upcoming marketing campaign aimed at ‘giving back’ to the community. The body of the email, sent in May 2020, reads:

Hi [Client Name], Ok, here is the final information!

The email will be \$7,500 for the activation fee. It will deploy the end of May on 5/26 so we can use extra funds and bill for FY20! Te [sic] email will give our members the opportunity to raise money for a good cause without pushing orders or order value. More so an open offer to come together during the pandemic. We recommend 15% as the donation percentage, and we can specify in fine print "up to \$X dollar amount" that is your maximum contribution even if sales yield higher - this makes it a bit safer on your end!

We can run an analysis using the UPCs if you want to see what 15% of the avg purchase history of these products in a 1 week period would yield. If significantly less than \$XX dollar amount chosen, we may want to adjust the % higher, such as 20% or 25%.

I will also need 4 assets/images for the email, please ma'am! Please let me know if you have any questions, thank you and glad we can make this work this month!!

[No Signature]

Instructors should ask students to assess the tone of this email along with the language choices the writer employs (particularly the use of “ma’am”). Then, the instructor should change an aspect of the rhetorical situation and ask students to revise accordingly. For instance, students may be told that the audience is now no longer the client, but a coworker (also working in the South) who needs to bring this project to fruition. After revising, instructors should ask students to reflect on those revisions with prompts such as: Why did you make the changes you made? What specific language choices were important when communicating with a coworker rather than a client? What changes reflect how you want to be seen as the writer (your ethos)? Such a revision exercise may

help students understand the correlation between language choices and the rhetorical situation as they are composing within specific workplace genres.

Genre Creation

Finally, students should have the opportunity to compose documents within genres from scratch. Instructors should task students with creating a particular genre on their own, either within the context of an existing corporation (if they are working with a local business for a service-learning activity, for instance) or within the context of a fictional (yet realistic) rhetorical situation. For this assignment, a social media post may be appropriate for students learning to communicate in the language of an organization. For instance, they may be provided with the following prompt:

Imagine you are the social media director for *The Bitter Southerner*, and you've been tasked with creating a new mini-campaign to bring joy to readers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *The Bitter Southerner* has a presence on three different platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. You will want to develop three posts for each platform that reflect the ethos of *The Bitter Southerner*. First, spend time on the company's website and social media platforms to get a sense of their voice. How do they normally interact with their audiences? What kinds of language do they typically use to communicate? Who is their typical audience? Next, draft posts following the generic conventions of each platform. Each post should be interrelated to convey a cohesive campaign to audiences.

This activity in particular asks students to place themselves within a specific rhetorical situation and compose using generic conventions, with attention to their language choices, for that rhetorical situation. Of course, this example will urge students to use

SUSE, as is fitting with this dissertation research. However, the selection of differing companies would allow for students to examine the language choices of other regions and social groups. For instance, if the company was not *The Bitter Southerner*, but the posts were composed for the social media platforms of Kashmir VII, an African American artist based in Atlanta, GA, students might be encouraged to experiment with AAVE in these posts; or if the prompt asked students to complete this assignment for Primanti Brothers based in Pittsburgh, they may need to research the language of that city to appropriately carry out this task. In any of these scenarios, students are invited to examine the intersection of rhetoric, sociolinguistics, and generic business compositions as they learn to compose for future writing scenarios.

None of these interventions—in textbooks or in activities—can guarantee transfer from the classroom to the workplace. We may only present to students the opportunities to learn new strategies that may possibly be applied in various, future communicative moments. The post-process movement in composition pedagogy teaches that there is no codifiable method of teaching composition (for business writing or more generally) that will work reliably and without fail in future scenarios. In the introduction to *Post-Process Theory: Beyond the Writing Process Paradigm*, Kent argues that “...post-process theory...endorses the fundamental idea that no codifiable or *generalizable* writing process exists or could exist” (1). Put simply, we cannot teach students how to compose for the ever-changing future, but we *can* help to equip them with the practices of analysis that allow them to read new rhetorical situations and know how to respond to them with the tools in their own linguistic repertoire. Students may one day have a boss unwilling to bend towards a more linguistic diverse workplace, encounter a situation in which their

regional language is mocked, or find themselves in 10,000 other scenarios that require making specific choices about their language use in particular communicative moments. We cannot prepare students for all of these scenarios. Most importantly here, though, is that students have the opportunity to learn how to identify the available linguistic choices in the context of rhetorical situations in particular business writing scenarios and genres.

So, what's next, y'all?

This dissertation study has offered a focused glimpse into the linguistic diversity present in workplace communications that has implications for how business writing instructors approach language use and genres in the classroom. There is still, yet, so much more to learn. While I focused on the field of marketing, women in South Carolina, using SUSE, additional research is needed to help solidify this data that crosses the boundaries of the Southern region, Southern language, and Southern womanhood. For instance, how do men employ SUSE in the same region? Or how does regional dialect function in communication at law firms? Or how do women communicate in workplaces on Long Island using their regional language patterns? With the methods presented in this study, there is now a framework to examine these additional populations of participants. Using the interview strategies, the data gathering mechanisms, and the coding scheme of this dissertation, new research is possible about how communities rely on their region-specific language to form relationships with coworkers, clients, and more.

Specifically, though, this is a step towards linguistic equality in the workplace and in our business writing curriculums. As addressed in Chapters 1 and 2, much research has been conducted by composition-rhetoric and sociolinguistic scholars to move away from the need to code switch and to a more fluid understanding of language that is translingual

and code meshed. For instance, in reference specifically to African American English, Young, Young-Rivera, and Lovejoy call for a code-meshed view of composition (in contrast to code-switching) in *Other People's English: Code-Meshing, Code-Switching, and African American Literacy* because code-switching comes at a high “cost” that leads to “linguistic confusion” and “increased negative attitudes” towards cultural, racial, and regional dialects (140). If Young, Young-Rivera, and Lovejoy invite us to see code-meshing as an ethical, equitable, recommended pedagogy, then we must consider how this practice influences the use of all dialects and variations of English and how they might integrate into studies and pedagogies of business writing. In short, Young, Young-Rivera, and Lovejoy open the door to a more inclusive view of written communication for speakers of all dialects across the US in both how society perceives speakers of those dialects and in how instructors teach writers to compose in their future workplace settings.

Change for society often begins in the classroom, and if those in higher education wish to enact a change towards language equality, it must begin with our research, which may inform our pedagogy, which may inspire our students as they leave the university's campus and enter into the workplace. This dissertation aims to do just that. In understanding how speakers of SUSE (a language variety often equated with less education or intellect) apply this language to their written business communications with rhetorical finesse and acuity, we may see the benefits of bringing instruction about language variation and equality into our business writing classrooms both to increase student awareness of difference among their peers and future colleagues and to provide students with the foundation to navigate an ever-changing business world that requires

their flexibility and ingenuity, not merely in their work ethic or their innovative ideas, but in the language they use to communicate successfully within their chosen profession. My hope is that the new method of workplace language analysis presented here and the emphasis on the importance of language variety in business communications demonstrated through this study of women professionals using SUSE will inspire instructors to encourage students to lean on the languages of their heritages to write rhetorically in the workplace and will instill in rising professionals an appreciation for individual language differences in their peers and beyond, preparing them for the coming tasks of communicating with rhetorical finesse in their careers ahead.

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